

*“Delivering on #Plan Belize”*

**BUDGET SPEECH**  
**FOR**  
**FISCAL YEAR 2023/2024**

*Hon. John Briceno*

*Prime Minister and Minister of Finance,*

*Economic Development and Investment*

Belmopan, Belize

Friday, March 10, 2023



**SUMMARY OF RECURRENT AND CAPITAL BUDGETS**

**FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2023/2024**

	<b>ACTUAL OUT-TURN 2020/21</b>	<b>ACTUAL OUT-TURN 2021/22</b>	<b>APPROVED BUDGET 2022/23</b>	<b>PROJECTED OUT-TURN 2022/23</b>	<b>SUBMITTED BUDGET 2023/24</b>	<b>FORECAST 2024/25</b>	<b>FORECAST 2025/26</b>
<b>TOTAL REVENUES AND GRANTS</b>	<b>\$952,971,061</b>	<b>\$1,135,762,228</b>	<b>\$1,263,300,144</b>	<b>\$1,359,645,344</b>	<b>\$1,408,268,486</b>	<b>\$1,478,905,069</b>	<b>\$1,553,216,364</b>
<b>RECURRENT REVENUE</b>	<b>\$905,968,235</b>	<b>\$1,092,423,297</b>	<b>\$1,222,619,348</b>	<b>\$1,319,945,661</b>	<b>\$1,372,743,486</b>	<b>\$1,437,875,069</b>	<b>\$1,506,186,364</b>
<b>TAX REVENUE</b>	<b>\$819,195,755</b>	<b>\$1,003,401,358</b>	<b>\$1,122,910,761</b>	<b>\$1,211,922,974</b>	<b>\$1,260,399,892</b>	<b>\$1,323,284,604</b>	<b>\$1,389,304,089</b>
INCOME & PROFITS	\$238,566,299	\$224,884,840	\$268,944,420	\$346,880,309	\$360,755,521	\$378,793,297	\$397,732,962
TAXES ON PROPERTY	\$6,799,376	\$8,610,819	\$10,000,000	\$6,503,990	\$6,764,150	\$6,967,075	\$7,170,683
TAXES ON INT'L TRADE & TRANSACTIONS	\$126,657,911	\$184,562,897	\$189,000,000	\$216,719,679	\$225,388,465	\$236,657,888	\$248,490,783
TAXES ON GOODS & SERVICES	\$447,172,169	\$585,342,802	\$654,966,341	\$641,818,996	\$667,491,756	\$700,866,344	\$735,909,661
<b>NON-TAX REVENUE</b>	<b>\$86,772,480</b>	<b>\$89,021,939</b>	<b>\$99,708,587</b>	<b>\$108,022,687</b>	<b>\$112,343,594</b>	<b>\$114,590,466</b>	<b>\$116,882,275</b>
PROPERTY INCOME	\$8,600,027	\$22,350,948	\$17,180,000	\$49,291,190	\$51,262,838	\$52,288,095	\$53,333,857
LICENCES	\$13,207,804	\$16,490,778	\$16,813,865	\$16,972,866	\$17,651,780	\$18,004,816	\$18,364,912
ROYALTIES	\$34,531,521	\$11,705,258	\$34,273,829	\$14,138,407	\$14,703,944	\$14,998,023	\$15,297,983
GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES	\$30,056,406	\$37,992,833	\$30,875,893	\$27,220,069	\$28,308,871	\$28,875,048	\$29,452,549
REPAYMENT OF OLD LOANS	\$376,721	\$482,122	\$565,000	\$400,155	\$416,161	\$424,484	\$432,974
<b>CAPITAL REVENUES:</b>	<b>\$16,253,990</b>	<b>\$4,642,241</b>	<b>\$5,680,795</b>	<b>\$8,421,300</b>	<b>\$5,525,000</b>	<b>\$6,030,000</b>	<b>\$7,030,000</b>
SALE OF EQUITY	\$275,475	\$32,630	\$309,702	\$210,962	\$25,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
SALE OF CROWN LANDS	\$15,978,515	\$4,609,611	\$5,371,093	\$8,210,338	\$5,500,000	\$6,000,000	\$7,000,000
<b>GRANTS</b>	<b>\$30,748,836</b>	<b>\$38,696,690</b>	<b>\$35,000,001</b>	<b>\$31,278,383</b>	<b>\$30,000,000</b>	<b>\$35,000,000</b>	<b>\$40,000,000</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$1,374,940,417</b>	<b>\$1,201,404,522</b>	<b>\$1,365,972,438</b>	<b>\$1,394,761,467</b>	<b>\$1,496,281,859</b>	<b>\$1,528,539,327</b>	<b>\$1,559,132,034</b>
<b>TOTAL RECURRENT EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>\$940,486,121</b>	<b>\$939,059,611</b>	<b>\$1,087,900,541</b>	<b>\$1,032,767,039</b>	<b>\$1,112,855,051</b>	<b>\$1,146,240,703</b>	<b>\$1,169,833,410</b>
PERSONAL EMOLUMENTS	\$451,979,852	\$413,262,437	\$461,787,807	\$446,264,370	\$468,000,000	\$482,040,000	\$496,501,200
PENSIONS & EX-GRATIA	\$88,861,280	\$98,348,281	\$100,865,711	\$97,222,400	\$100,000,000	\$103,000,000	\$105,000,000
GOODS & SERVICES	\$179,187,000	\$209,731,952	\$224,667,095	\$204,894,987	\$230,000,000	\$236,900,000	\$241,638,000
SUBSIDIES AND CURRENT TRANSFERS	\$154,103,789	\$153,315,462	\$188,595,545	\$178,990,749	\$202,369,884	\$208,440,981	\$214,694,210
DEBT SERVICE-INTEREST & OTHER CHARGES	\$66,354,200	\$64,401,478	\$111,984,383	\$105,394,533	\$112,485,167	\$115,859,722	\$112,000,000
<b>TOTAL CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$434,454,296</b>	<b>\$262,344,911</b>	<b>\$278,071,897</b>	<b>\$361,994,428</b>	<b>\$383,426,808</b>	<b>\$382,298,624</b>	<b>\$389,298,624</b>
CAPITAL II EXPENDITURES	\$210,421,201	\$151,683,607	\$160,761,659	\$219,695,804	\$218,124,538	\$220,000,000	\$225,000,000
CAPITAL III EXPENDITURES	\$210,826,102	\$103,854,831	\$115,011,614	\$140,000,000	\$158,003,646	\$160,000,000	\$162,000,000
CAPITAL TRANSFER & NET LENDING	\$13,206,993	\$6,806,473	\$2,298,624	\$2,298,624	\$7,298,624	\$2,298,624	\$2,298,624
RECURRENT SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	<b>-\$34,517,886</b>	<b>\$153,363,687</b>	<b>\$134,718,807</b>	<b>\$287,178,622</b>	<b>\$259,888,435</b>	<b>\$291,634,367</b>	<b>\$336,352,954</b>
PRIMARY SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	<b>-\$355,615,157</b>	<b>-\$1,240,815</b>	<b>\$9,312,089</b>	<b>\$70,278,409</b>	<b>\$24,471,794</b>	<b>\$66,225,465</b>	<b>\$106,084,330</b>
OVERALL SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	<b>-\$421,969,357</b>	<b>-\$65,642,293</b>	<b>-\$102,672,294</b>	<b>-\$35,116,123</b>	<b>-\$88,013,373</b>	<b>-\$49,634,257</b>	<b>-\$5,915,670</b>
AMORTIZATION	<b>-\$70,881,836</b>	<b>-\$65,016,295</b>	<b>-\$97,471,635</b>	<b>-\$88,290,736</b>	<b>-\$122,793,838</b>	<b>-\$138,778,513</b>	<b>-\$157,398,331</b>
<b>FINANCING</b>	<b>-\$492,851,193</b>	<b>-\$130,658,588</b>	<b>-\$200,143,929</b>	<b>-\$123,406,859</b>	<b>-\$210,807,211</b>	<b>-\$188,412,770</b>	<b>-\$163,314,001</b>
<b>GDP (in billions of Bz) (Current prices)</b>	<b>3.291</b>	<b>3.707</b>	<b>3.948</b>	<b>5.854</b>	<b>6.253</b>	<b>6.613</b>	<b>6.851</b>
<b>OVERALL SURPLUS/DEFICIT (+/-) AS A % OF GDP</b>	<b>-12.82%</b>	<b>-1.77%</b>	<b>-2.60%</b>	<b>-0.60%</b>	<b>-1.41%</b>	<b>-0.75%</b>	<b>-0.09%</b>
<b>PRIMARY SURPLUS/DEFICIT (+/-) AS A % OF GDP</b>	<b>-10.81%</b>	<b>-0.03%</b>	<b>0.24%</b>	<b>1.20%</b>	<b>0.39%</b>	<b>1.00%</b>	<b>1.55%</b>

*“Theme”*



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Madam Speaker

## **I – Introduction:**

I rise to provide the annual accounting of the public finances and the economy, to review the performance of the National Budget for the current Fiscal Year 2022/23, and to present Government's Estimate of Revenues and Expenditures for Fiscal Year 2023/24.

At the close of March, this Administration will complete its second full budget year, and I am exceedingly proud to proclaim that our second year has, like the first, attained surpassing successes for Belize and for our people.

By almost every measure of economic progress, Belize is doing so much better than before we took office.

The economy is growing, expanding in 2022 by an estimated 12.4 percent, more than 10 times the average annual growth rate of 1.7 percent experienced under the United Democratic Party (UDP) administration. Comparing these two trajectories, at the UDP administration's average annual rate of growth, it would have taken almost two generations, a half a century (50 years) for Belize's economy to double in size. With the rate of growth experienced and projected under my administration, our economy will double in size in just about ten years. That simply means a lot more money in all our pockets much faster. Everybody wins.

More Belizeans have jobs, 95 percent of those who seek employment are working.

42,965 workers have received a \$1.70 or 51 percent per hour salary increase by the recent raising of the minimum wage to \$5 per hour.

The sceptics on the other side said it couldn't be done, they said who comes next would face the worst.

Yet here we are, 68,000 fewer Belizeans are poor, according to the last poverty assessment.

Exports are rising and serious crimes are falling.

Fourteen thousand public officers, teachers and security personnel received a restoration of their full wages last July.

And a few weeks from now, we will restore increments for our deserving public officers, teachers and police officers.

For the first time in a generation, Belize's public debt is deemed sustainable, as the country's indebtedness has been cut in half in just the last two years.

And once again, I table a new Budget today that contains a primary surplus and a Budget that does not include any tax increases whatsoever.

Quite the opposite of tax increases, last year, \$3 million per month or \$100,000 per day in taxes was foregone by our Administration in order to moderate the increase in the pump price of fuel and keep it as stable as possible.

Today, on the world stage, in direct consequence of a sustained effort by this Administration to mobilise private sector innovation and capital, to refocus public investments on education, healthcare and vital infrastructure and to build alliances with International Financial Institutions (IFIs), Bilateral and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) partners, Belize's position and profile sparkle and shimmer like never before.

In just the last few weeks alone Belize has:

- played host to a senior delegation of executive directors from the World Bank representing 68 countries;
- hosted the President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB);
- served as the venue for the annual meeting of the IDB Governors for Central America and the Dominican Republic;
- concluded the most positive International Monetary Fund (IMF) Article IV Consultation in decades;



- signed the first major disbursement of US\$10 million from the United States Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Agreement in support of education and reducing the cost of electricity; and
- assumed the Chairmanship of Central American Integration System (SICA) following our eventful Chairmanship of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
- And in this month when we celebrate the achievements of women worldwide, we are can report the successful implementation of the Women Economic Empowerment Project, which in its first full year of implementation, has already included 44 new initiatives worth more than \$2.6 million.

How distant now do those bleak, final days of the UDP appear, those desperate times when the government had to borrow \$1 million per day to pay public officer salaries and borrow just to keep the lights on; those traumatic times when Belize had effectively defaulted on its international commercial debt and when devaluation of our dollar seemed inevitable.

To that chaos and hopelessness, we shall never return, Madam Speaker.

Not so long as we remain faithful to our sacred pledge that “Everybody Fi Win”.

In a meaningful partnership with the people and day by day we have kept moving forward delivering on #Plan Belize.

Day by day we have kept our focus on addressing poverty, educating our children, keeping our citizens safe, providing adequate healthcare for all as well as protecting our environment.

In my presentation today, I propose to address five broad themes:

First, to outline domestic and regional economic conditions;

Second, to review financial sector and real economy developments;

Third, to report on the projected performance of this year’s Budget which ends on March 31, 2023;

Fourth, to summarize the estimates for the new Budget, which starts on April 1, 2023;

And lastly, to highlight select policies and reforms that can have a substantial impact on the economy, the public finances and most importantly, the quality of life for the citizens we are sworn to serve.

## II - External Conditions:

The performance of the economy and the budget is shaped by many issues outside of Government's control. As a small, open and vulnerable economy, external factors such as extreme climate events, global economic shocks like that caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, high inflation suffered by our major trading partners like the US, US and other global benchmark interest rates, US and global economic growth, supply chain disruptions, trade regulations, among others, can either help or hinder our fortunes.

For context, therefore, some attention to the external conditions is important.

The IMF's World Economic Outlook (WEO) for January 2023 reported that global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanded by 3.4 percent in 2022, down from 6.2 percent in 2021. Growth in the Latin American region averaged 3.9 percent in 2022, with the notable performances being the United States of America at growth rates 2 percent, Mexico at 3.1 percent and the Caribbean at 10.3 percent. Growth in Central America moderated to 4.2 percent, down from the 5.5 percent in the previous year.

In addition, the IMF projects that the 2023 United States GDP growth will fall to 1.4 percent, while the global rate of economic growth will fall for the second consecutive year to 2.9 percent.

The Russian invasion of the Ukraine which began last February, and the attendant impacts on fuel and food prices and supply chains provoked the return of high inflation after two decades of relative price stability. Global inflation reached 8.8 percent in 2022, a level exceeded only once in the previous 26 years.

While the year 2022 will be remembered for its return to the "old normal," following almost two years of pandemic disruption and social distancing, the prospect of rising interest rates, necessary to tame the beast of inflation, as well as the unmistakable pattern of climate-induced calamities, foreshadow a possible recession in the United States, the country most connected to our economy.

Of especial importance for Belize is the trajectory of tourism: global overnight travel is expected to grow by 28 percent and the cruise sector by 13 percent. This will undoubtedly have a positive impact on our tourism sector.

Over the last 12 months, every major interest rate has seen an uptick: for example, the 10 year US Treasury Rate has increased from 0.06 percent to 4.74 percent while the benchmark Secured Overnight Financing Rate (or SOFR) has risen from 0.05 percent to 4.55 percent.. These increases have the effect of slowing growth and commercial activity worldwide.

The year 2023, then, by all accounts, will be a difficult year for the US economy, with the almost universal belief being that the Caribbean and Latin America will see a deceleration of economic activity, perhaps, with the possible exception of commodity exporting countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana.

### **III - Real Economy and Financial Sector Developments:**

#### **Real Economy**

In Belize, annual economic growth, according to the latest Statistical Institute of Belize data, reached 12.4 percent in 2022, an impressive jump and double what the IMF had predicted in last year's Article IV Report. This 12.4 percent rate of growth is even more momentous that it comes on the heels of 15.2 percent in 2021. Of course, the growth was not uniform across all subsectors.

In the primary sector which edged lower by 0.9 percent during 2022, lobster, chicken and yellow corn saw increases while banana, citrus, shrimp and cattle experienced contractions.

In the secondary sector where growth was 11.9 percent, increases were achieved in sugar, beverage production, construction supplies and domestic electricity generation. On the other hand, citrus juice, fertilizer and imported electricity weakened.

In the tertiary sector which grew at a vibrant pace of 13 percent for the year, there was almost uniform growth, in accommodations and food service, wholesale and retail trade, transportation, support services including the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector and public administration; only in financial and insurance activities was there a small decline.

Notably, domestic exports rose by \$46 million, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by \$15.7 million, for the first nine months of the year, and remittances by \$14 million.

The Central Bank of Belize conservatively foresees net FDI, which totalled \$261 million in 2022, remaining above a yearly total of \$200 million right through to 2027 and chiefly in businesses related to tourism and leisure, agri-business and agro-processing, fisheries and aquaculture, offshore outsourcing and other industries such as sustainable energy, light manufacturing and logistics.

Inflation in Belize rose to 6.3 percent for 2022, up from 3.2 percent in 2021. Still, these rates were far below the global rates of 8.8 percent in 2022 and 4.7 percent in 2021.

What is remarkable though is that 2022 GDP output has exceeded 2019 levels even though tourism arrivals remain materially below this key subsector's 2019 performance. On this basis, there appears to be substantial in-built capacity for continued growth in 2023, in tourism and across the economy.

## **Financial Sector**

Monetary and financial conditions stabilised in 2022 and fundamental indicators remain strong. A resurgence in lending to the private sector and the continued solid growth in the gross official reserves of the Central Bank underpinned a 4.7 percent money supply expansion. During the year, the net foreign assets and net domestic credit of the banking system – the two largest components of money supply – grew by 5.2 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively.

On the one hand, the rise in net foreign assets was solely attributable to the 14.0 percent growth in the Central Bank's foreign portfolio as those of domestic banks dipped slightly. The elevated position of the monetary authority's foreign balances occurred despite an increase in external debt servicing, as robust inflows from sugar export receipts, grants and purchases from commercial banks enlarged reserves. Meanwhile, domestic banks' net foreign assets decreased by 7.3 percent on account of the higher outlays for imported goods and services due to inflation, alongside the full-scale resumption of profit repatriation and dividend payments to international firms.

Notwithstanding these outflows from banks' foreign holdings, increased foreign revenues flowed into the banking system from tourism, BPOs, commercial freezone activity, and exports of agricultural products.

On the other hand, credit to all three economic agents increased, led by an upswing in lending to the private sector, and to a lesser extent, quasi-Governmental entities, and Central Government.

Central Bank Gross Official Reserves stood tall at \$960 million at the close of 2022, with import cover comfortably exceeding the recommended 3-month cover. The IMF projects this level to be maintained for the entirety of their most recent forecast period which extends to 2028.

Private sector borrowings climbed by \$104.0 million or 4.5 percent, nearly double last year's outturn, and the largest annual increase since 2019. Most of the new disbursements were allocated for

merchandise trade, agriculture, and transport activities, while repayments and write-offs for loans to households partially offset the outturn.

Bank liquidity inched up by \$4.6 million in 2022, following increases of \$219.5 million and \$278.1 million in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The slowdown in liquidity growth was on account of the pickup in lending and the decline in domestic banks' foreign asset holdings. As a result, excess liquidity, regrettably, amounted to \$702.9 million 91.9 percent above requirements, a situation which the Regulator is actively reviewing. Excess cash reserves summed to \$499.3 million, 211.0 percent above the required level.

Weighted average lending rates decreased by two basis points to 8.62 percent during the year, while weighted average deposit rates slipped by 15 basis points to 1.90 percent . As a result, the weighted average interest rate spread widened by 13 basis points.

*As the IMF underscored, the regulatory capital of domestic banks at 16.6 percent of risk weighted assets, is higher than the required minimum but lower than before the pandemic. Non-performing Loans (NPLs) have crept higher to 7 percent of gross loans, a shade higher than the prudential ceiling of 5 percent, primarily due to pandemic-induced business contractions and in some cases, excessive risk-taking. Nonetheless, the IMF concludes that “the Central Bank’s process for strengthening banks’ balance sheets and resolving problem loans after the pandemic has been well executed. The CBB has sufficient tools should it need to intervene.”*

## **IV - Fiscal Year 2022/2023 Performance**

I now turn to the actual performance of revenues and expenditures for this Fiscal Year 2022/23.

Total revenues and grants are projected to come in at \$1,356 million, of which 89 percent is tax revenue, 8 percent is non-tax revenue and 3 percent in capital revenue and grants.

Actual revenue and grants exceeded the original budgeted amount by approximately 6.9 percent or \$93 million, an over-performance of \$89 million, which is attributed to tax revenues.

On the expenditure side, total spending, including supplementary allocations approved during the Fiscal Year is expected to be \$1,436 million, which is \$71 million or 5 percent more than the original estimate.

Recurrent expenditure will come in \$48 million more than the original estimates while investments in capital projects will total approximately \$397 million, or an additional \$119 million.

This year's budget will require total financing of about \$178 million, to be sourced from the following loan facilities: \$120 million from the IFI lenders, namely the IDB, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the World Bank, Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund, \$30 million from the Republic of China (Taiwan); and \$28 million from domestic borrowing.

Once again, Belize benefitted from the generosity of the Government and People of the Republic of China (Taiwan), to whom I offer our abiding appreciation.

At the bottom line for this Fiscal Year, therefore, Government expects a Primary Surplus of half a percent of GDP or roughly \$31 million. The Primary Surplus is an important gauge of budget health, representing the difference between revenues and expenditures, but without interest charges. A positive primary balance such that we achieved in FY 2021/22 as well as this Fiscal Year, is a clear signal of our fiscal strength and the capacity to sustain our debt.

The Overall Deficit, which includes interest cost, is projected to be 1.38 percent or \$80.5 million, a level that is affordable.



During the Budget Debate, Ministers will delve into the financial details of their portfolios but allow me to highlight some of the major capital projects funded from our external partners. In Fiscal Year, these include, as thirteen examples,

- (1) ongoing upgrading of the Caracol Road,
- (2) ongoing upgrading of the Coastal Road,
- (3) upgrading of the PSW Goldson Highway and Remate Bypass Project,
- (4) upgrading of the Sarteneja Road and the construction of a new bridge at Laguna,
- (5) the new Haulover Bridge,
- (6) the completion of 3 miles of the Nago Bank Road under the Resilient Rural Belize Program,
- (7) the Natural Disaster Management Project & Climate Vulnerability Reduction Program,
- (8) a new tranche for the Social Investment Fund,
- (9) the Strengthening and Digitization of Tax Administration,
- (10) The Education Quality Improvement Project & the Education Reform Program,
- (11) the Sustainable Tourism Program,
- (12) the construction of police and defence facilities and the procurement of equipment including forensic equipment under the Belize Integral Security Program, and
- (13) the new loan program at the DFC designed specifically for MSME's especially women led small businesses

As if these were not already great achievements, through the Social Investment Fund we inaugurated six school projects, provided lap tops for every child as a part of the Belize City South Side free education program, constructed three polyclinics and built three new water systems all at a value of 13 million dollars.

Madam Speaker, while progress is being made on many fronts, I would like to take time out to high light one in particular - and that is the remarkable Turn Around at the Lands Department.

At the start of our administration, our backlog instruments were at over 20,000. We have managed to reduce that to 2,687. In the 2022/23 fiscal year alone, we cleared 9,860 instruments.

In fiscal year 2022/23, National Estate produced approximately 10,000 lease approvals, purchase approvals, grants and land certificates.

The land mobiles are a huge part of eradicating the backlogs that haunted the Ministry from time immemorial. We practically held a land clinic every two and a half weeks - equally split between public land clinics and internal land clinics. A total of 22 land clinics combined.

But perhaps more refreshingly and instructive for the economy, is that we are at this minute concluding a special land clinic for the Land Registry, that saw the completion of 2,500 land certificates and land titles - reducing the backlogs there by 50 percent. And that does not include the over 14,000 land certificates, deeds and Transfer Certificate of Titles that have been issued over the course of the fiscal year.

All these efforts, the reduction of the backlogs at National Estate from 20,000 to under 3,000, and the halving of the Land Registry backlogs from 5,000 to 2,500, will allow the Ministry to get current - to now ensure that the wait time for lease approvals, and purchase approvals, and land certificates and land transfers are cut down considerably.

In the past year, we distributed a little over 1000 purchase approvals and titles to what we call the Super Constituencies - the teachers, nurses, police officers, public officers and Belize Defence Force soldiers.

And as we speak, 10,000 lots are being surveyed all over the country so that we can reach first time land owners as well as more public officers, teachers and nurses, and members of our police and security forces..

And in this coming financial year we will do even more!

## V - The Public Debt:

I now report on the public debt.

At December 2022, the total public debt stood at \$4,031 million or the equivalent of 64.1 percent of the GDP.

Disaggregated, approximately \$2,716 million represented loans to external lenders, while \$1,314 million was owed by Government to domestic creditors. Thus, 67 cents of every dollar of debt is owed to foreign creditors and 33 cents of every dollar to local creditors.

With regard to the external debt, approximately 41 percent is owed to multilateral lenders such as the CDB, the World Bank, the IDB, CABEL, the OPEC and the Kuwaiti Funds; 30 percent is classified as bilateral debt owing the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; and the remaining 29 percent is the Blue Bond obligation.

With regard to the domestic debt, 51 percent of Treasury Bills and Treasury Notes are owed to the Central Bank of Belize, 19 percent to the various domestic banks and the remaining 30 percent to institutional and individual investors.

To meet the terms of this debt stock during this fiscal year, Government paid some \$112 million in interest and \$97.5 million in principal repayments.

Of every dollar in total revenue and grants for this budget year, Government therefore paid 8 cents in interest. The average interest rate on the public debt comes in just under 3 percent, though rising interest rates globally and in particular increases to the benchmark Secured Overnight Financing Rate (SOFR), will nudge upward the cost of financing the public debt.

Each year, going back 20 years, the IMF, based on what is called a debt sustainability analysis, has appraised Belize's public debt as unsustainable, which is double speak for credit distress and potential default. That being the case, there is a special sense of achievement to quote from this year's IMF Article IV Concluding Statement:

***“The Government has achieved a large reduction in the public debt...from 133% of old GDP to 101% of new GDP, ...to 80% of GDP in 2021,... to 64.1% in 2022.”***

And the Statement provides the specific measures that resulted in this spectacular achievement of reducing the public debt from 133 percent of old GDP to 64.1 percent of new GDP:

***“the rebasing of national accounts, sizable fiscal consolidation, the debt for marine protection swap, strong GDP growth, expenditure containment including a temporary 10 percent cut to public sector wages and the suspension of wage increments during FY 2021/23, a strong recovery of revenue and a material discount on the debt owed to Venezuela under Petrocaribe.”***

I invite those on the other side of the House to consider this fact: the public debt surged by two billion dollars between 2009 and 2020, from \$2.2 billion to \$4.2 billion.

In contrast, this Administration, through its public debt management operations, has reduced the amount owed by the Government by over one billion dollars. US\$315 million in debt reduction attributable to the Super Bond/Blue Bond transaction, which includes the principal reinstatement Belize avoided; up to US\$163 million of Petrocaribe debt from the recent reduction provided by Venezuela; and US\$39 million in damages avoided by the settlement last September of the compensation claims for Belize International Services Ltd (BISL). A grand total of US\$ 517 million of debt reduction.

And the IMF projects that debt to GDP will, even in an unchanged policy scenario, fall to 53 percent of GDP by 2028 while interest payments on debt will not exceed 1.8 percent of GDP, more or less the current level of debt servicing costs.

Rescuing our dollar from devaluation while restoring Belize’s credit worthiness are without question, epoch-making accomplishments of this PUP Administration-done in just two short years!

## VI - MTDS/Medium Term Fiscal Projections:

Due to our fiscal performance in 2020/2021 and even as we worked to put our financial house in order at the start of this year, and after sweeping deliberations, the Government shared with stakeholders and the public Belize's Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS). The action plan is founded on six key cornerstones:

- (1) Poverty reduction,
- (2) economic transformation and growth,
- (3) trade deficit reduction,
- (4) Citizen Security,
- (5) Protection of the Environment and
- (6) Stopping Corruption.

Some 224 Programs and Projects are identified as critical for the achievements of targets in each area of focus. And these programs and projects in turn interlock with the Ministry of Finance's Five Year Fiscal Forecast, including the flow of funding from both external and domestic sources.

Into the 5-year horizon, both the IMF and the Central Bank expect revenue and grants to average 23 percent of GDP; wages, pensions, goods and services and subsidies and transfers at 16 percent of GDP, debt servicing at just under 2 percent of the GDP and crucially, capital investments at 5.6 percent of GDP. At these levels, the primary balance remains positive, and the overall deficit stays below 1 percent of GDP, a level that can be financed.

It is that last number – capital spending – representing less than 20 cents of every dollar at Government's disposal from revenue and grants, that largely funds the programs and projects necessary for the attainment of the Medium Term Development Strategy objectives.

And it is to enlarge this investment pool that public sector wages and operational-related spending must be contained, tax collections must continue to improve and new sources of financing, such as the Green Climate Fund, must be maximized.

Ultimately though, Belize cannot and should not expect that the great leap forward will be funded by handouts or reparations for the climate catastrophe caused by the so-called developed countries. While we pursue novel sources of financing, what remains within our control is to reduce waste, to ensure those who should, pay their fair share, and to lessen the 70 cents out of every public dollar that is consumed by non-capital spending.

Consider Hurricane Lisa as an example. Lisa made landfall just south of Belize City last November at the very end of the hurricane season, causing substantial losses. National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) estimates damages totaling 212.4 million dollars with 172,000 affected by the storm. And how much financial support came from external sources? A grand total of 2.2 million US dollars, a mere drop in the bucket, most of which came from our Central American development partner, CABEI, with whom we are truly grateful. Fortunately, this administration had by then created sufficient fiscal space for supplementary allocations, which addressed the most urgent needs of our people.

## VII - Fiscal Year 2023/2024: New Budget:

I will now outline the estimates of revenues and expenditures for the new Fiscal year 2023/24.

The Ministry of Finance projects total revenues and grants of \$1.408 billion comprised of tax revenues of \$1.,372 billion, non-tax revenues of \$112 million, and capital revenues of \$5.5 million and Grants of \$30.0. million

The sub-categories of tax revenues are as follows:

- (1) taxes on goods and services that accounts for 49 cents of every tax dollar,
- (2) taxes on income and profits accounting for 26 cents of every tax dollar,
- (3) taxes on international trade and transactions accounting for 18 cents of every tax dollar,
- (4) and taxes on property accounting for less than 1 cents of each tax dollar collected.

On the expenditure side, a total of \$1.496 billion is proposed. Of this sum, \$1.112 billion is classified as recurrent spending covering wages, pensions, goods and services, subsidies and transfers and debt service interest costs.

I am pleased to confirm that effective 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 the wage provision include the resumption of increments (which will be based on merit) for Public Officers, a full 12 months prior to the original date for restoration.

In addition to recurrent costs, \$383.4 million is programmed for capital investments during the new Fiscal Year, of which some \$158 million are so called Capital 3 funding, drawn down from the various loans and grants already approved.

\$122.8 million is the amount projected for amortization payments; that is, the repayment of principal on loans already contracted.

The Budget for Fiscal Year 2023/24 is forecasted with a primary surplus of \$24.3 million or 0.39 percent of GDP, that GDP projected to be a robust 6.253 billion dollars of economic output. Inflation for 2023 is forecasted at 4.1 percent.

The overall deficit for Fiscal Year 2023/24 will be 1.41 percent of GDP, or some \$88.1 million. Budget financing requirements including Amortizations will total \$210 million to be sourced from the following facilities:

Loans from International Financial Institutions - \$128 million

Grants from our Bilateral Partners - \$30 million

Domestic Financing - \$54 million

In addition to several of the major multi-year capital projects to receive funding once again in this FY – such as the Caracol, Coastal and Sarteneja Roads, the PSW Goldson Highway, the Remate Bypass and the Haulover Bridge, as well as upgrading of 4.7 miles of the Valley of Peace Road, 3 miles of the San Carlos Road and 3 miles of the Trio Road under the Resilient Rural Belize Program, among others – new project funding will flow to these programs:

- The San Estevan Road Construction Project
- The Strengthening Public Expenditure Management Project
- The Lands and Civil Registry Digitization Project
- The Sustainable and Inclusive MSME Program, and
- The Trade and Investment Facilitation Project, among others

Let me say this Madam Speaker, as a result of my taking time to visit communities across this nation, having spoken and interacted with Belizeans from every walk of life, and fielding questions time and again from the press about the rising cost of living, I am aware that with all our successes of the past year, there are still many Belizeans who believe they are working harder and spending more for less.



We all are.

The fact is that the global shocks I laid out earlier are affecting people worldwide.

To alleviate this, we have to spend more of our income on Belizean-made products, invest more in Belizean ingenuity and creativity and waste less, and budget smart.

Micro Small and Medium Size Enterprises (MSMEs)

Through collaboration and partnerships, the Government of Belize has transformed itself into an effective, forward-looking, fiscally disciplined entity that places the support of our Belizean businesses at the heart of Plan Belize, which will continue to pursue efforts for the implementation of the MSME Strategy.

The National **MSME Roadshow** is an initiative that lent support to the MSMEs across Belize under the following pillars: **Capacity Building, Access to Finance, Policy and Legislative reform, MSME Formalization, and Market Access**. This National effort was implemented between August to November 2022 and complimented the drive to support local businesses by buying locally-produced goods and services. This support is crucial given small businesses' important role in creating jobs, strengthening communities, and increasing economic prosperity. To combat the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising costs of doing business, and increased competition as a consequence of globalization, we joined forces to ensure that MSMEs have opportunities for fair access to finance and other support programs that will improve their competitiveness. This government supports our MSMEs, promoting buying Belize and remaining engaged in our country's development as MSME's have shown that in the majority they are women owned and or women led.

To build upon what was stated Government approved a Fiscal Incentive Bill that provides incentives across the spectrum of MSMEs and very importantly, reduces the time to approval for both foreign and local investments.

These incentives also offers Micro and Small businesses the option to formalize an amnesty upon registration and provide a year's exemption from Business Tax. All MSMEs under the Fiscal Incentive program will be allowed to register for GST to qualify them to obtain their GST refund.

Another very important incentive is with Government procurement in which the Fiscal Incentive program recognizes MSMEs and allows them to supply the goods or services they produce to Government. The Fiscal Incentive program is earmarking 20 percent of all government procurement tenders to MSMEs, that is 20 percent of the Government's Forecasted Budget 2024/2025 equalling approximately 45 Million dollars

The other incentive tool is the "One Off" incentive which will allow the importation of goods for capital investments, and this will expire after 12 months and will not exceed one million dollars of imported goods. The intention of this investment tool is for businesses that wish to quickly import machinery or equipment to increase production or to expand in a short period of time, due to demand in the market. The "One Off" will allow them to import within a short period of time, with a very streamlined application process, but with certain restrictions.

In the very near future, the Government of Belize through the Ministry of Investment and Beltraide along with our partners in the private sector and civil society will embark on a massive campaign to sensitize all Belizeans that buying local will benefit the country. It is the smart thing to do!

## VIII - Impacts of the New Budget

Madam Speaker, apart from the on-going support for the recurrent and capital programs this New Budget will focus on several priority areas in keeping with our Medium Term Development Strategy and with the overarching goals of Plan Belize.

More money is being provided for following high priority areas:

- An additional \$4.0 million to expand the Free Education Program to schools in the Southside of Belize City and in the Toledo District.
- An additional \$1.0 million to fund the surveying and processing cost for lots for first-time, low-income homeowners.
- An additional \$7.0 million for the expansion of the National Health Insurance Program in the Orange Walk District.
- An additional \$3.0 million for municipal streets and drains.
- An increase of \$5.0 million to meet the recruitment of an additional 225 police cadets, 110 BDF recruits, and some 60 coast guard recruits.
- An additional \$1.0 million to support the Financial Intelligence Unit including the establishment of a Civil Asset Forfeiture and Recovery Unit to combat corrupt behaviour.

## **IX - The Reform Agenda**

### **Public Officers Pension**

This year, Government will have spent \$95 million on the pension plan for public officials. In the next budget the spending rises to 100 million dollars. The IMF estimates that the present value of this pension liability is 77 percent of GDP, more than the entire public debt of the country. I have said publicly, and I say again: this budget line spending is neither sustainable nor fair.

Belize is an outlier in every material respect so far as retirement age, replacement rate and contribution rate is concerned. Everywhere else in the Caribbean and Latin America, public officers pension schemes are contributory. In most of the region the voluntary age of retirement is 60 years and mandatory retirement age of 65 years. In the Caribbean, countries with special pension plans for public officials tend to have higher retirement ages, 60 years in the case of Trinidad & Tobago and Suriname, for example, and 65 years plus in the case of Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua.

The IMF has presented their formula for public pension reform and sustainability which involves a contribution rate of 10% (of wages) half of which or 5 percent to be contributed by public officers, raising the current retirement age from 55 to 65 and reducing the replacement rate from 67 percent to 50 percent, all to be gradually phased in over time.

I happy to report that at a recent meeting of the Ministerial Consulting Team that has been engaged in meetings with the Joint Unions on the important issues of Increments and Pension Reform significant progress was made.

The update was positive, as the Joint Unions have agreed to a phased implementation of a contributory pension scheme, having recognized that the current pension scheme is unsustainable.

The first phase of the contributory pension scheme will commence with persons entering the Public Service as of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 and the Unions have agreed to work with the Government on mechanisms for a second phase rollout, where other Public Officers will be included in the contributory pension scheme.

For sure we must applaud our Ministerial Team but more so the Joint Unions team for this historic and unprecedented collaboration and achievements.

We look forward to the continuation of constructive, reasoned, and respectful dialogue.

## **Policy Enhancements**

Quite apart from the categorical steps this Administration has already adopted in the pursuit of national prosperity, the recent IMF's report singles out several of the policy enhancements that are already in train.

- = access to affordable credit for micro, small and medium size enterprises
- = the Credit Reporting Act
- = the impending Credit Bureau and Collateral Registry
- = the electronic invoice module and the modernization of the Fiscal Incentives Act
- = the digitization of the land and the business registries
- = the single investment window
- = the digitization of firms and government services
- = updating the national risk assessment and AML/CFT strategy
- = steps to mitigate the financial integrity risks in the international financial sector
- = and, the legal framework for restricting activities involving virtual assets

This impressive sequence of policy and legislative action is a small sampling of creative solutions this Administration has advocated as we stride towards our strategic objectives.

Looking forward the legislative agenda planned for the new fiscal year includes several key pieces of legislation all aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public finance management and administration .

### **These include:**

**A new, Procurement and Assets Disposal Act** – aimed at centralizing procurement and disposal of Government Assets all in accordance with the current international principles of good governance, accountability, transparency , integrity, fair competition and value for money

**A new, Public Financial Management Act**-to ensure responsible, sustainable, transparent, accountable, effective, efficient and economical management of the public finances and public resources including the revenues, expenditures, assets and liabilities.

**A new, Property Transaction Tax Act** =- to facilitate the official and effective administration and collection of property transaction taxes derived from property transactions in substitution for Stamp Duty.

**And, Tax Administration Legislation including** amendments to the Income and Business Tax Act, the General Sales Tax Act , and the Tax and Administration and Procedure Act – all aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, and equity, of the tax system.

## **Poverty Reduction**

My Cabinet colleagues and I realize that we cannot reverse the prevalence of poverty overnight.

But our policies and this Budget reflect a passionate determination to hasten that reversal.

The recent analysis, published earlier this week by the Statistical Institute of Belize, showed the rate falling from a UDP-produced high of 52 percent, to 35.9 percent. This is an encouraging start. So are the 7,478 new jobs created in 2022. The opportunity for work at a minimum wage, now \$5 per hour, is the most basic step out of poverty.

Education, we all know is also a critical antidote to poverty. That’s why the free secondary school education program is being funded to the tune of \$6.4 million providing support of 2,600 students who would otherwise not be in the classrooms. And the novel STEAM Program, set for launch in the new school year with an inaugural class of 75 students, adds one more option for acquiring professional skills.

Housing, the thousands of homes we plan to construct, whether directly or private sector built supported by housing development incentive programs, is another lift out of poverty. So far 260 starter homes have been delivered and another 200 will be completed in this fiscal year.

There is one other massive, though often overlooked, antidote to poverty – that’s land, property, for those who are first time landowners. Whether for a home, a small farm or simply as an asset to be leveraged for greater financial independence, a parcel can be a gateway out of poverty. And that is why, with support from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Natural Resources, is spearheading a survey and

distribution program for almost 11,000 parcels in areas of all six districts. Final surveys have been funded and are almost completed.

Assigning a modest value of ten thousand per lot would mean that this program alone represents 110-million-dollar transfer of wealth to first time and qualified landowners.

Now, that is truly transformational governance.

## **X - Conclusion**

There is no duty more inviolable than the management of the public purse. Taxes paid to the State are the product of the blood, sweat and tears of citizens, individual and corporate, who rightfully expect those they elect to allocate these monies wisely. And, they expect those in the public service to spend these monies carefully.

There is no duty more sacrosanct than the management of the public purse. Taxes paid to the State are the product of the blood, sweat and tears of hard-working citizens, who rightfully expect those they elect to allocate these monies wisely. And they expect those in the public service to spend these monies carefully.

The value of a dollar does not change whether that dollar is directed towards the \$132 million construction of the new Coastal Road or the purchase of a new \$800 weed cutter for, say, the Village of Scotland Halfmoon.

I will therefore never tire of demanding diligence and honesty – value for the people’s money - from those in Parliament with Executive responsibility as well as those public officials who oversee the budgetary and spending processes of government.

The public officers, the projects and the programs funded by this budget are all directed toward the betterment of life for Belizeans, and the security of Belize as a nation state. From the proceeds of this Budget, over four hundred thousand of us, living in in cities, towns and villages, should all benefit, many directly but all in aggregate.

In two short years, this Administration has rekindled trust in the public finance, recouping and far overshooting the pre-pandemic output of the economy and the scope of public sector spending and investments.

The magic, the marvel of Plan Belize has only just started.

We push on ensuring that our efforts will lead to more homes, more of our children in schools, more persons included in NHI, more land in the hands of first time landowners, a more efficient and effective



public service, more jobs, a stronger social safety net, safer cities and yes cleaner and greener rivers, stream and seas.

As we look ahead my administration will not fear, we will not weep, we choose to be bold, and we are determined to do more and to be extra for Belize.

From Consejo in the North to Barranco in the South, from Benque Viejo in the West to the Lighthouse Reef islands in the East, a brighter sun shines, a different, more confident nation awakens.

And with the guidance of our Creator, let us stride forward, perhaps stumbling at times but always moving forward, to that noble land where justice and prosperity abound and where every Belizean shall share in this “wealth untold.”

Thank you.

Madam Speaker this bill has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

## **XI - Appendices:**

## Appendix 1 – Table of Select Indicators

	2018	2019	2020	2021 <sup>R</sup>
<b>POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT (Average)</b>				
Population (Thousands)	395.9	408.5	421.5	432.5
Employed Labour Force (Thousands)	155.9	167.7	145.5	174.2
Unemployment Rate (%)	9.4	9.0%	13.7%	9.2%
<b>INCOME<sup>(1)</sup></b>				
GDP at Current Market Prices (\$mn)	4,630.1	4,833.3	4,160.3	4,983.3
Per Capita GDP (\$, Current Mkt. Prices)	11,695.6	11,832.5	9,871.1	11,521.8
Real GDP Growth (%)	1.1	4.5	-13.4	15.2
Sectoral Distribution of Constant 2014 GDP (%)				
Primary Activities	10.3%	9.8%	10.7%	11.4%
Secondary Activities	13.9%	13.9%	16.4%	15.9%
Tertiary Activities	63.2%	63.7%	61.1%	60.4%
<b>TOURISM</b>				
Stay Over Arrivals (Thousands)	453.1	464.1	133.7	212.6
Cruise Ship Passenger Arrivals (Thousands)	1,087.3	1,053.5	308.8	189.2
<b>MONEY AND PRICES (\$mn)</b>				
Inflation (Annual average percentage change)	0.3	0.2	0.1	3.2
Currency and Demand deposits (M1)	1,598.5	1,681.8	1,965.5	2,233.1
Quasi-Money (Savings and Time deposits)	1,418.8	1,510.4	1,568.3	1,735.5
Money Supply (M2)	3,017.3	3,192.3	3,533.8	3,968.5
Excess statutory liquidity	240.6	200.7	420.3	698.3
Excess cash liquidity	196.6	193.8	351.9	415.6
Excess securities	187.7	162.4	206.0	167.8
<b>CREDIT (\$mn)</b>				
Domestic Banks Loans and Advances	2,119.9	2,238.0	2,278.1	2,313.0
Public Sector	50.6	58.0	41.3	27.8
Private Sector	2,069.3	2,180.0	2,236.8	2,285.2
<b>INTEREST RATE (%)</b>				
Weighted Average Lending Rate	9.0	8.8	8.5	8.4
Weighted Average Deposit Rate	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.3
Weighted Average Interest Rate Spread	7.7	7.6	7.3	7.2
<b>BALANCE OF PAYMENTS (US \$mn)<sup>(1)</sup></b>				
Merchandise Exports (f.o.b.)	451.7	425.3	289.0	422.0
Merchandise Imports (f.o.b.)	896.9	968.5	731.4	956.1
Trade Balance	-445.2	-543.2	-442.4	-534.0
Remittances (Inflows)	89.7	94.5	118.3	133.0
Tourism (inflows)	439.2	526.7	246.9	374.1
Services (Net)	396.8	442.5	255.2	327.5
Current Account Balance	-151.7	-184.6	-127.9	-157.9
Capital and Financial Flows	134.5	145.7	183.1	192.1
Gross Change in Official International Reserves	-17.8	-17.8	70.2	75.1
Gross Official International Reserves	295.6	277.9	348.1	424.0
Import Cover of Reserves (in months)	3.6	3.2	5.2	4.7

Sources: Ministry of Finance, Statistical Institute of Belize, & the Central Bank of Belize

(1) Data for 2022 only include information from January to September

## Appendix 2 – Link to Draft Estimates

<https://mof.gov.bz/uploads/files/ypadoxeu.pdf>

## Appendix 3 – Ministry Submissions

### Ministry of Health and Wellness

#### MOHW Achievements 2022:

##### Epidemiology Unit

Childhood Vaccine rates increased.

Zero malaria cases. A WHO team is currently in the country for verification in preparation for certification as a Malaria Free Country.

Reduction in Case fatality rate for COVID in 2022

Reduction in Maternal mortality rate

Reduction in Infant mortality rate

Increase in HIV project targets

##### Completed and Closed Projects:

INDIAN Grant – Project consisted on the procurement of equipment and supplies to address COVID-19 and has been of much impact. The installation of an incinerator in Caye Caulker Village and installation of morgue freezers at NRH and WRH is pending.

CDB and SIF – Successfully completed the construction of Crooked Tree Health Center, Caye Caulker Health Center and Belmopan Polyclinic

##### IADB:

Immediate Public Health Response: US \$6.2 Million

Project ended (December 2022)

Meso-America Project: Closed in Sep. 2022 Maternal and Child Health Improvement

Audit ongoing

Vaccine Loan: US \$5 Million

Pending reallocation of funds (Approx. US \$556,109)

Pending procurement of cold chain equipment

Regional Initiative in the Elimination of Malaria:

*“Delivering on #Plan Belize”*

Initial Grant of US \$162,500 and counterpart funding of US \$487,500

Global Fund – C19RM: US \$637,394.44

Support hiring of HR, training, procurement of medical equipment etc...

**At this time Belize is being assessed with the objective of verifying that the country complies with all the requirements to be classified as a malaria free country.**

## **EU Funds:**

SMART Health Facilities:

Retrofitting ongoing at PGCH, SRH, and CCH

Pending: Central Medical Laboratory, NRH and WRH

CDEP: Clinical Data Exchange Platform

Contract awarded: this platform will allow for data exchange between MOHW and NHI, and any other relevant public entity for the sharing or retrieving of relevant health data; e.g. linking to Vital Statistics.

Capacity Building Training Completed

## **World Bank: Loan of US \$6.2 Million**

1<sup>st</sup> disbursement of US\$750,000 received for procurement of vehicles, hiring of staff and consultants, communication campaign, and medical equipment

Technical Cooperation ongoing for Climate resiliency, Gender Based Violence training, and client satisfaction survey

## **IAEA: (International Atomic Energy Agency)**

New project proposal submitted to IAEA for radiation safety

## **Taiwan:**

Radiology training in progress

- Two portable x-ray machines acquired
- 4 persons trained in imaging

Funds have been allocated for construction of San Pedro Hospital

Design planning in process

## **Global Fund:**

Interventions are ongoing with assistance of the Global Fund to improve the coverage of testing, treatment compliance and viral suppression in persons with HIV.

Procurement of test and commodities

Hiring of adherence counsellors, peer navigators and TB Coordinator

Procurement of medical equipment such as the gene expert machines

## **United States Government (USG) Funds:**

Procurement and placement of Road Safety signs,

Mental Health support for persons who have been in RTAs

Water Safety signs for water systems

Procurement of 8 advanced PCs and 15 laptops to be used by the technical advisors and to upgrade the epidemiology unit

## **Construction/Infrastructure:**

Ongoing: Construction of the Placencia Polyclinic II

Design Planning started for the Pediatric Wing at NRH, San Pedro Hospital, and Duck Run I Health Center

Pending: Design Planning for a tertiary hospital in Belmopan City and construction of a Central Medical Stores building

○ **)Research and technical Areas:**

Develop the framework of the Research Unit.

Registration of the MOHW institutional review board (IRB) organization (IORG) by the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)

Completed Analysis and Conceptual Models with Barriers to conducting the Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance study in Belize.

Developed and created conceptual models and completed revisions for the Belize Treatment Literacy Manual for HIV/STIs and Viral Hepatitis

**Human Resources for Health:**

Creation of 106 nursing posts

Filing post for doctors, nutritionists, hospital administrators, Epidemiologist, adherence counsellors, social workers, pharmacists

Increased of stipend for Community Health Workers

Scholarships for 15 BSN and 20 PN , 2 Public Health Nursing at UTEC, 3 IPC in Taiwan and 18 studying midwifery currently

Stipend expanded from 25 to 38 nurses

Supported through study leave with pay 10 doctors to specialize

**Medical Management and Lab strengthening:**

HPV test introduced

Gene expert machines procured for all health regions; this has allowed for COVID-19, HIV and tuberculosis tests to be done at district level vs having to send the samples to Belize City.

**Others:**

*“Delivering on #Plan Belize”*



A Platform for the management of Human Resource for Health has been developed

- Taiwan – Project on NCDs and Primary Health Care
- Development of the National Health Policy Development Guidelines
- Nutrition Policy, pending to be finalized/approved
- Capacity building training for Managers
- Completion of the Situation Analysis for the HEARTS Initiative Program. (This is an initiative to address non communicable diseases and its determinants)
- Completion of a baseline Quality Improvement evaluation for public health facilities
- Capacity building to Radiologists and Radiography technicians to strengthen diagnostic imaging through a Taiwan funded project.
- Submission of the project design of ‘Enhancing Radiation Safety and Development of Human Resources for expanded diagnostic imaging services
- Development of promotional material for the Road Safety Education Campaign for the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS)
- Pre-feasibility study for the construction of health facilities with CABEI has been completed
- Participation in a regional training course on Radiation Protection at Diagnostic and Interventional Radiology Facilities through IAEA
- Developed draft of the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan with the inclusion of Comprehensive Pediatric Cancer Plan
- Mental Health Policy revised
- Training for Police officers in dealing with mental health emergencies
- Development of a Tobacco Policy: ongoing
- Increase in stipend approved for 230 Community Health Workers
- Breastfeeding Policy-ongoing
- Ambulances: procured four ambulances and currently the MOHW is in the process of procuring three more to strengthen the ambulance service in different districts.

### **Some Pictures of Retrofitting and New Build**

## New Health Facilities:



Image showing Belmopan, Caye Caulker and Crooked Tree Health Facilities- newly built



Renovation of Ladyville Health Center  
*“Delivering on #Plan Belize”*



## **Renovation of Hattieville Health Center**

## **Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration**

### **Accomplishments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: FY 22/23**

The second year into its term the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration has kept pace with its constitutive mandate in contributing to the national development agenda of Belize.

With the transition to full opening of the economy last year, the Ministry continued to support the Ministry of Health and Wellness Vaccination Programme through the sourcing of COVID-19 vaccines. In this regard, most of the COVID-19 vaccines were sourced through donations. The first shipment of pediatric vaccines of 124,800 doses (5–11-year-olds) arriving in country was sourced through the efforts of the MFA and a bilateral partner. This contributed to the safe reopening of schools countrywide.

*“Delivering on #Plan Belize”*

The Ministry engaged bilateral partners and international organizations in an effort to deepen relations. It convened forums for political dialogue and cooperation with four bilateral partners including the European Union and El Salvador and, held inaugural bilateral consultations meetings with Qatar and Japan. The Ministry is currently pursuing support for the GoB's social housing programme from the Qatar's Fund for Development, along with finalizing the framework in other areas of cooperation such as education, culture and sports, and media exchanges.

In May of 2022, the Ministry supported an Official Visit of H.E. Manuel Lopez Obrador, President of Mexico. During this visit, President Obrador announced the granting of tariff free access to Mexico's market on a range of agriculture and agriculture related products from Belize and other countries which do not yet have a trade arrangement with Mexico. The important matter of a longer-term trading arrangement was discussed and it was agreed that it would be further explored. In addition, Belize was incorporated in the "*Sembrando Vida*" Project, an agricultural project that will train and introduce agro-silvo-pastoral production system to Belizean rural producers, while contributing to food security and job creation.

Also on the bilateral front, Belize continued its historic engagement and support of Cuba. In April 2022 Hon. John Briceno, led a delegation for an official visit to the Republic of Cuba. The Prime Minister's visit was successful in reaffirming the political, economic, and social affiliations between the two countries. In February 2023, Prime Minister Briceño welcomed President Miguel Díaz-Canel and his delegation to Belize. A historic and symbolic visit in the 27 years of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Through high-level, and strategic diplomatic visits, the Government of Belize will continue to facilitate cooperation and signal the quality and strength of our bilateral relations with other states as well as our multilateral partners.

The OAS plays a key role in maintaining the peace between Belize and Guatemala in relation to the claim on Belize by Guatemala. In this regard, the Ministry supported the visit of H.E. Luis Almagro, Secretary

General of OAS, to Belize in August 2022. During this visit, the need for continued observance of the 2005 Confidence Building Measures by both Belize and Guatemala was emphasized, in among other matters of importance.

The Ministry's mandate for trade and economic integration with Central America dominated the agenda with the visit of the Secretary General of SIECA, H.E. Francisco Lima Mena in August of 2022. During this visit, the benefits of deeper economic integration with the countries of Central America was amply discussed with a cross section of private and public stakeholders.

In terms of advancing regionalism, Belize assumed the Presidency Pro Tempore of SICA in December 2022, for the first semester of 2023 (January – June). In this regard the Foreign Minister of the Dominican Republic, Roberto Alvarez, visited Belize. This assumption comes shortly after its term as Chair of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM. At only its second term of activity since its earlier hiatus, the MFA has the dual task of reaffirming the commitment of SICA member states to regionalism and confirming this commitment among its international partners. Belize's approach for PPT 2023 is to focus on development issues germane to the region such as migration, food security, climate change and regional integration between the sub-regions of CARICOM and SICA.

Consistent with its mandate for international cooperation, the MFA continues to oversee the successful implementation of the Women Economic Empowerment Project, in its first full year of implementation, being done in partnership with Taiwan. So far a total of 44 new initiatives have been approved, totaling Bz. \$2.6 mn. The project has supported retooling and retraining of skills for over 300 women, in areas such as sewing, entrepreneurship, food processing and digital literacy. It has provided business training to over 50 women-owned MSMEs.

The Government of Belize is advancing a foreign policy that complements its national development needs and is at its core- performance driven. As such the Ministry has undertaken to review the performance and relevance of our current Embassies and is determined to establish new diplomatic missions with the aim to explore new avenues of cooperation, opening new markets for Belizean products, tourism and attract investment.

A further development from the commitments made in Plan Belize for a robust, active, and engaged foreign policy strategy, the Ministry is developing the International Cooperation Council (ICC). The mandate of the ICC includes the following:

The development, coordination and monitoring of international cooperation towards the achievement of national goals and objectives outlined in Plan Belize;

The alignment of national priorities with the interests of international cooperation partners.

The development of the ICC is important to harmonize and streamline the cooperation activities of the Government of Belize to complement our national development agenda. The Government of Belize in the process of operationalizing the ICC.

### **Hurricane Lisa**

On Wednesday, 2 November 2022, an upper category one (1) Hurricane Lisa made land fall approximately 10 miles southwest of Belize City.

Belize's bilateral, multilateral partners and other non-state actors responded with immediacy and generosity to our time of need. We also acknowledge the outpouring of support by the Belizean Diaspora. The monetary resources pledged to date amounts for \$5,464,133.85 BZD. This figure does not account for the in-kind, supplies and technical resources received.

The Ministry continues to mobilize resources to address the impact of Hurricane Lisa.

The Ministry sought and received the support of our UN Partners in conducting a post disaster needs assessment (PDNA) survey. This assessment was led by a national team and supported by international partners, the EU, the UN, the IADB with the technical facilitation of UNDP.

The preliminary findings indicate that the Social Sector accounts for the largest damage (BZD 67 m.) with Housing being the hardest hit. The Productive Sector bears the largest losses, (BZD 43.4 m.) with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Sector bearing the most significant impact.

## **Foreign Trade:**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade actively pursued and secured the ratification of the Economic Partnership Agreement (ECA) by the Republic of China (Taiwan) in January 2022. The Agreement provides tariff concessions which enable Belizean exports to enter the market of the RoC without the application of import duties, thus making it cheaper and more profitable for Taiwanese to import a wide list of goods produced in Belize, including sugar, beef, turkey, tilapia and other fish fillets, lobster and shrimp, cheese, beans, dried fruits, corn meal, cassava starch and flour, soya products, orange juice concentrate, and sauces, jams and jellies. Belize is now exporting lobster, animal feed, pepper sauces, jams and jellies valued at 9.78 million BZD.

Cognizant of the need to build a robust global economy that is resilient and sustainable, the Ministry has prioritized the enhancement of GOB's trade facilitation services to make the country more competitive in the region to reduce the time and cost to import/export goods and to facilitate the ease of doing business.

Minister Eamon Courtenay together with the President of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the European Union and project beneficiaries, launched the Belize Trade projects on 10 February 2022.

These projects, financed through grant funds totalling US\$1.5 Million, seek to assist and enhance the capacity of the Government of Belize to facilitate trade. The long term benefits will contribute to building capacity and resilience in the public sector by improving service delivery, lowering trade costs and reducing processing time for trade in goods.

In February 27th, 2023, the Ministry in conjunction with the CDB and the OAS held robust stakeholder consultations on the projects especially on a Feasibility Study for the Establishment of an Electronic Single Window (ESW) for Trade the gold standard for Trade Facilitation implementation. This Government is serious about systemic improvements that will make doing business in Belize far easier than before.

The DGFT worked tirelessly with the Belize sugar industry to establish and operationalize the CARICOM Monitoring Mechanism for Sugar (MMS) in 2022. The MMS will secure and safeguard Belize's trade interests and its right to sell sugar in the CARICOM market. The implementation of a MMS puts in place arrangements to ensure that, where extra-regional imports of refined sugar are being contemplated, regional producers are given the opportunity first to supply. Only where regional suppliers are unable to supply will Member States be authorised to exempt the payment of the Common External Tariff (CET).

In 2022, Belize, through support from UNCTAD, improved national awareness and understanding of the opportunities of the WTO TFA to support women in trade. The course allowed participants to see through

a gender lens those areas of reform required to facilitate trade by considering the importance of women to the economy and the difficulties they face when trading across borders. Further engagement with trade associations and other private sector players is necessary to understand the challenges faced by Belizean women traders, and to ensure appropriate measures are taken to further integrate them into the trading landscape.

The NTNC a forum for tripartite dialogue and consultations between the government, the private sector and civil society on trade and trade related matters has had a busy agenda since its inception in May 2021. The Commission provides an appropriate forum to the national dialogue on important trade policy matters.

The Ministry continued to pursue through negotiations, trade expansion with neighbouring Guatemala for an expansion of the product coverage under the Belize/Guatemala Partial Scope Agreement (PSA). After substantial efforts at the technical level the agreement is yet to be finalized as this Government insists on market access for its most important agricultural products. Both parties agree on the need to continue negotiations to bridge the gap as soon as possible.

We were able to secure much needed market access into Mexico for live animals and proceeded meats, fruits and vegetables through special arrangements through President Obrador's Decree of 7 May 2022. The Ministry is also pursuing a robust Trade Agreement with Mexico which will concretize market access for Belizean products.

### **Future priorities:**

In an effort to take advantage of nearby markets, Belize is actively pursuing the expansion of the PSA with Guatemala. With Mexico, the Government has resolved to enter negotiations towards a Trade Agreement. A solid agreement will assist Belize in formalising trade relations and streamline administrative processes at border points to expedite cross-border movement of products (agricultural and otherwise).

Through the trade facilitation implementation roadmap, Belize will seek to mobilise funds from international donors over the next three to four years to expedite cross-border movement of products. Belize finds that lowering the cost of trade and improving its ports efficiency is essential for deepening Belize's integration into the multilateral trading system.



Going forward, the Ministry will actively explore integrating with the Central American Trade Facilitation System which is based on an integrated electronic transit system to manage and control the movement of goods in transit.

In line with Plan Belize, Operationalization of the Monitoring Mechanism for Sugar (MMS), will secure Belize's sugar interest in the region in 2023 and beyond. This will put in place arrangements to ensure that, where extra-regional imports of refined sugar are being contemplated, regional producers are given the opportunity to prove that they are able to supply the quantities and specifications required by manufacturers.

## **Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology**

### **Making Education Work for Belize**

The #PlanBelize agenda of the John Briceno administration has been committed to education from the start. For the past two years, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology has been steadily moving towards reforming and transforming the system of education to ensure that it is inclusive, of high quality, accessible and equitable, technologically driven, and capable of fostering the development of good, productive citizens.

#### **Curriculum Reform**

Even before the launch of the Belize Education Sector Plan in August 2021, focused work had started on curriculum reform. The Curriculum Reform Steering Committee was formed with representatives from education stakeholders – principals, teachers, and students, union and church representatives, persons from primary to tertiary levels were included, and an extensive consultation process began. With the unwavering support of UNICEF, fourteen months and thirty consultations later, the Steering Committee produced the National Curriculum Framework, a document which recognizes the reality of curriculum overload, supports the reduction of learning outcomes, and emphasizes the value of competency-based education.

The National Curriculum Reform Framework, based on International Bureau of Education and UNESCO standards to guide the development of the national curriculum at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels of education with a focus on student competency, was launched in July 2022. Since the development of the framework, teams have been focused on the development of competency-based unit plans and assessments, utilizing authentic student-centered pedagogies such as inquiry, discovery, cooperative, experiential, problem, and project-based learning.

This academic year 2022-2023 is a transition and pilot year for all preschools and primary schools, as well as for the high schools that decide to use the new National Curriculum Framework. It is serving as an important time for schools to continue their efforts at “catching up” for all students who have fallen behind because of the pandemic. All preschools, primary schools, and secondary schools should be following the new National Curriculum Framework by the 2023-2024 school year.

In keeping with the objectives of the competency-based curriculum is the Think Equal program which will begin to be used in every Infant 1 and Infant 2 classroom across the country by September 2023. Think Equal is a comprehensive, holistic program designed to equip preschool children with the foundation they need for positive lives. The focus on social and emotional learning is a natural complement to the National Curriculum framework, with its targeted efforts to teach values and psycho-

social skills and competencies which will engender empathy, self-esteem, and respect for the dignity, value, and equality of others. Already being implemented in 20 other countries, this nationwide rollout in Belize will be truly revolutionary and impactful for our youngest students.

The consultation efforts of the Ministry to support the curriculum implementation have continued. *To answer without listening – that is folly and shame* is a proverb the Ministry takes seriously, because the dialogue has continued. It is clear that if Belize is to learn from the lessons of the recent past, we have to adjust not only what we teach, but also how we teach. The Ministry has established a pro-tempore Teacher Support Group whose primary purpose is to assist teachers and administrators with any challenges they may face during this pilot phase. Nationwide consultations have happened for primary schools and are now ongoing for secondary schools. The Ministry remains engaged with all relevant stakeholders to support this revolutionary process.

## **ConnectED**

The curriculum revolution cannot be successful if it does not include efforts to transform delivery methods as well. We must consider the practical uses of the internet in schools and determine how to ensure that all schools can have adequate access to the internet and all students have access to devices.

The Ministry successfully renegotiated an agreement with Digi to upgrade and expand internet infrastructure in 197 schools countrywide. Schools that already had internet access but only in limited areas will now be able to enjoy internet access in all classrooms and common areas. The GIS mapping that first tracked schools' reopening in the midst of the pandemic is now being used to support this ConnectED project, and ConnectED, thanks to the support of the Republic of China (Taiwan), will support the agreement now signed with Giga to work towards ensuring that all schools across Belize will be able to connect to the internet.

As of the beginning of March 2023, 128 of the target schools have already been successfully Connect-ED. More schools are connected every day. By the end of April 2023, the target goal will be reached, and more than 66,000 of our 105,000 students across the country will be able to access 500 mbps of internet, installed across their campus as a Wi-Fi managed solution, with 24/7 monitoring, support and maintenance.

## **Special Education**

The Ministry has devoted massive energy to Special Education in the past year. The pioneering work of the Special Education Unit includes some of the following activities:

conducting over 25 parent and teacher trainings through the Teacher Learning Institute, for an average of over 150 participants in each session,

collaborating with Therapy Adventures out of Chicago in the United States to provide long-term therapy opportunities with trained therapists living in Belize,

building capacity with the Special Education officers and restructuring and strengthening their processes to provide services, including training on writing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs),

ensuring that the Belize Education Management Information System (BEMIS) now includes a Special Education Module for accurate collection of data,

assisting with the redesigning of Stella Maris, the government ‘special education’ primary school to support Stella Maris’ new focus on functional learning and life skills,

initiating the review of existing policy and drafting of new policy related to inclusion at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels of education,

conducting its first ever 10-week intensive special needs summer camp to include one-on-one Occupational Therapy, Behaviour Therapy, and Speech and Language Therapy,

collaborating with Therapy Abroad for speech clinics, hearing screening and a Tiny Tyke speech and language mini camp,

increasing public awareness of special education needs with more community outreach and collaboration with new and existing partners,

updating diagnostic testing capacity for the SpEd unit,

and introducing the Essentials for Living curriculum into pilot special classrooms, working with targeted teachers and students to provide life skills education for persons with moderate to severe disabilities.

The only way to make sure inclusion happens for persons with special needs and diverse abilities is to build capacity from the inside out, for ministry personnel, teachers, parents, and caregivers.

Some of the SpEd Unit's more current projects include:

**The Inclusion Corner** - The SpEd Unit has updated their forms and put together a variety of checklists and strategies for teachers and parents. Checklists for a variety of possible disabilities and learning needs can be used to identify whether a child should be referred to SpEd, and the strategies vary for each disability. Also, on the Inclusion Corner, every week there is a new 15-minute video so anyone can start learning basic sign language.

**T4TBz** – The SpEd Unit sent out an evaluation to teachers who participated in our training sessions and received over 250 responses which made it clear that many interested teachers have learned quite a lot about evidenced-based interventions. They did, however, mostly ask for MORE - more training sessions and more time. The Teachers 4 Teachers Community Forum was created to allow teachers to share success stories, ask and answer each other's questions, and post resources and relevant information. This forum builds their confidence to work with students with special learning needs and to implement strategies taught in the sessions. Therapists and professionals in the group help to answer questions and provide more support for teachers.

- **Screening for GEMS Schools** - The SpEd Unit is providing some support to schools who are part of the Education Upliftment Project: Together We Rise by screening students to find out their Math and Reading levels, and then working with the team to develop strategies on how to work with these students and provide ongoing, relevant teacher training as requested.

## **National Healthy Start Feeding Program**

Truth be told, we must be as aware of the basic needs of our community as we are ready to be bold enough to make new efforts to transform education. The Ministry has recognized that students at all levels are impacted by physical realities outside their control. It's not just varied learning needs that impact their ability to function in school.

The National Healthy Start Feeding Program, supported by the Republic of China (Taiwan), is designed to support students in possibly the most important way. Hungry students cannot learn. Ensuring that students get a nourishing meal daily while they are at school is key to getting students to come to school and to stay in school. The pilot National Healthy Start Feeding Program serves 9 primary schools in 3 districts (Corozal, Orange Walk, and Belize), for about 900 students, and 6 high schools in Belize City and Stann Creek for another 1300 students.

## **Rural Education Grant Fund**

The commitment to providing access to education to students across the country is integral to the BESPlan and to PlanBelize. Roughly 25% of our population is school-age, and our young people in rural communities often need additional support in order to afford to start and to stay in school. The creation of the first ever Rural Education Grant Fund of \$1,000,000 has served over 600 students from rural communities with scholarships and financial assistance to tertiary level institutions in the past year.

These are only some of the ongoing initiatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology. The goals of *Reforming the System of Education*, *Transforming Teaching and Learning*, *Prioritizing Underserved Sectors*, and *Maximizing Human Capital* remain at the core of every activity, every undertaking. Minister Fonseca stated clearly in his message in the BESPlan, that “with over

100,000 students enrolled in our education system from preschool to university, we have a unique opportunity to shape the future, change the future, build the future.” We remain focused and committed to serving our nation in our efforts to continue to make education work for Belize.

## **Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise**

### **Summary of Achievements in Agriculture, 2022**

#### **Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise**

Agriculture remains a robust economic activity for the country, driving the economy forward, providing vigorous economic activity that translates to other sectors of the economy as our nation continues to enjoy food security.

### **Summary of Achievements**

#### **Vegetable Production**

Enhanced and improved storage technology for vegetables and root crops, allowing for longer shelf life of vegetables such as onions and potatoes before being taken to market, longer production cycles, higher production amounts and better quality for the local market and Belizean consumers. Total production in onions and other crops reflects the new confidence farmers have in their production cycles, with onion production showing a 31.8 % increase in 2022, going from 2,566,64 pounds harvested in 2021 to 3,384,065 in 2022. Producers can now engage in production for 10 months instead of only 6 months. The active inclusion of BMDC also means producers have a more viable means of distribution and marketing for their products. In many cases BMDC buys the products directly from the farm, guaranteeing sales for the farmer, ensuring distribution to local markets, securing the supply chain for consumers, and most importantly, building farmer confidence.

The production statistics for 2022 below indicate mostly increases from 2021 figures

<b>Commodity</b>	<b>2021 production</b>	<b>2022 production</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Onions (lbs)	2,566,642	3,384,065	31.8
Potato (lbs)	3,144,812	1,305,000	-58.5* <sub>1</sub>
Coconuts (nuts)	13,789,246	41,437,480	200.3
Limes/Lemons	120,567	124,050	2.9
Tomato (lbs)	2,590,180	3,000,049	15.8
Sweet Pepper (lbs)	2,280,176	2,221,207	-2.6
Carrots (lbs)	2,083,481	2,015,837	-3.2
Hot Pepper (lbs)	590,113	719,190	21.9
Lettuce (lbs)	780,764	966,068	23.7
Broccoli (lbs)	112,000	228,922	104.4
Cauliflower (lbs)	105,320	109,160	3.6

## Projects

Assistance to Belizean farmers through involvement in projects has enhanced the lifestyles and improved the capacity of farmers to be resilient, especially rural women and youth. Successful implementation of projects has seen close to \$15,000,000.00 distributed to farmers to date in materials and deliverables.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Dollar Value Assistance to farmers BZD up to 2022</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>
11 Projects	\$14,703,000.00	6,000 citizens impacted

Our inclusion in Sembrando Vida, thanks to President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of Mexico will translate to 2,000 farmers benefitting from the assistance provided through this project.

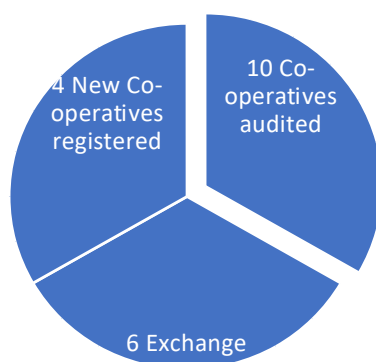
## Cooperatives Department

1. Registered four (4) new co-operatives: Orange Walk Beekeepers in Orange Walk District, Concepcion Vegetable Farmers and Northern Sustainable Agro-Producers in Corozal District, & Sayab Farmers, in the Cayo District.
2. Audited ten co-operatives: Belize Bus Owners, Bus Terminal Market Square Taxi, First



Stop Taxi, Golden Crops, Cayo Quality Honey, Valley of Peace Consumer, Placencia Producers, Placencia Tour Guides, Maya Freshwater, & Marigold Women.

3. Facilitated six exchange and information sharing visits among farmer co-operatives.



## Livestock

A one year 15% tariff waiver on cattle exports to Mexico was successfully accomplished. Increases in size of national herd and number of animals slaughtered for local consumption. Increases in sheep slaughtered, poultry, turkeys, swine, and honey production.

LIVESTOCK		2021	2022	% Change
<b>CATTLE</b>	Population			
(Head):		168,096	178,594	<b>6.2</b>
	Head Exported	42,405	32,447	<b>-23.5*<sub>2</sub></b>
<b>MILK</b>	Total Production			
(lbs)		16,596,189	11,663,747	<b>-29.7</b>
<b>SHEEP</b>	(slaughtered)	1,845	2,289	24.1
<b>POULTRY</b>	slaughtered	11,214,550	11,915,126	6.2
<b>TURKEY</b>	slaughtered	45,861	62,071	35.3
<b>SWINE</b>	(Head slaughtered)	34,896	38,763	11.1
<b>HONEY</b>	Total Production			
(lbs)		122,547	133,852	9.2

<b>Description</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Black Beans (million lbs.)	4.87	6.28	29
Acreage	5,234	7,590	45
Soybeans (million lbs.)	38.15	59.82	57
Acreage	28,851	36,115	25
Cowpeas (million lbs.)	3.85	3.76	-2
Acreage	7,915	4,512	-43

## **Grains, Legumes and Traditional Crops**

Grains and legumes production show increases in productivity in 2022. With the favourable investment climate, farmers in Spanish Lookout and Blue Creek have investments in soybean processing plants for soybean meal and oil production. These investments will significantly transform the grain and livestock production in Belize.

For traditional crops, more sugar was produced from slightly less sugarcane milled. Grapefruit production showed a sharp increase as did the yield for grapefruit as measured in boxes.

Description	2021	2022	% Change
Sugarcane milled (million lbs.)	1.893	1.803	-5
Sugar (Metric Tons)	177,875	179,421	0.9
Acreage	103,385	102,093	-1
Orange (million boxes) (90 lb boxes)	1.33	1.30	-2
Acreage	18,811	43,262	130
Grapefruit (80 lb boxes)	115,029	143,188	24
Acreage	1,745	4,144	137
Banana (million boxes)	5.37	4.66	-13
Acreage	7,809	7,800	-0.99

## **BMDC**

The main achievements of BMDC include enhancing its function as the marketing arm of the MAFSE and stabilising prices for consumers and producers by purchasing at farm gate, then distributing to market; the establishment of a new branch in San Pedro introduced a distribution arm that enables

the island to get fresh produce on a regular basis and at the same time provides mainland farmers with access to a viable market.

## **Initiatives in Support of Agriculture**

Minister Jose Abelardo Mai continues a strong schedule of marketing initiatives in support of agriculture. These trips abroad represent opportunities to learn more about marketing environments, make networking connections and participate in sessions where linkages are made with private partners from other countries.

<b>Trip</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Latin American Summit, Cancun	Marketing and investment linkages
El Salvador Marketing	Marketing linkages, export opportunities
Taiwan delegation visit	Bilateral relations with Taiwan, marketing, investment
Quintana Roo Commerce and Trade centers	Linkages with Hot Pepper producers, trade and investment opportunities
Guyana Agrifood Investment Forum	Investments in agriculture
Peten, Guatemalan Technical Visit	Technical collaboration in agriculture between both countries
FENACOCO Tour, Brazil	Technical information on coconut cultivation

## **Other Achievements of MAFSE**

- Stability and increase in number of visitors to Corozal Free Zone
- Donation of Firetruck from ROC (Taiwan) to CFZ
- Infrastructure plan for new access road and improved internal infrastructure underway
- Supplies Control Unit active monitoring of prices and legislative violations by importers
- National Agriculture Fair successfully re-instituted in annual calendar. Over 36,000 persons visited the NATS Showgrounds
- Successful re-vitalizing of shrimp industry through improved technologies, leading to higher yields, efficient phytosanitary regimes and lower mortality

- Formation of multi- sectoral Shrimp Industry Task Force
- Active participation with international partner agencies as MAFSE attended international conferences such as COP27 in Egypt and FAO Summit in Chile, while Belize assumed chairmanship of SICA-CAC January-June 2023
- Procurement of donation of fertilizer from Republic of Morocco to benefit Sugarcane, Citrus and Banana Industries.

*\*1- Potato production recorded a decline due to 2 factors primarily: procurement of poor seed stock at beginning of crop season that led to sharp decline in production, and inclement weather at time of harvest.*

*\*2- Cattle export numbers declined in comparison with 2021 due to more animals being kept for breeding stock. This caused less animals available for market.*

## **Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations**

**Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations**

**Belize Tourism Board**

## **Border Management Agency**

### **Budget Presentation Points**

**March 3, 2023**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Tourism**

The Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations (MTDR) works closely with both its statutory boards, the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) and the Border Management Agency (BMA), to develop the tourism industry. Having overcome the challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, Belize's tourism industry has recovered, and all indicators are that tourism in Belize is trending upwards. Visitors are once again arriving in record numbers. The 2022 figures reflect more than 370,000 overnight visitors through all borders. This indicates that tourism recovery is up to 75% of the pre-Covid figures in 2019. The 2022 overnight arrival figures also represent a 69% increase in visitors compared to the annual total for 2021. There has also been a steady rise in cruise visitor arrivals with over 612,000 cruise visitors for 2022. This figure accounts for over 52% of the 2019 annual total. Furthermore, it represents a 191% increase in cruise visitors compared to the annual total for 2021.

Belize is becoming increasingly accessible for travelers with air connectivity to major cities in the US and Canada. In addition to the traditional routes from flagship carriers, 2022 saw the return of Westjet, Air Canada, Southwest Airlines, and Sun Country. Tropic Air also expanded its international service from Belize to San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and El Salvador, ensuring even more connections to our Central American neighbors. We continue to work to build air connectivity regionally and in North America, Europe, and South America. The approach to the development of the Belize tourism product continues to be creative and strategic marketing, stakeholder capacity-building, destination enhancements, and collaborations with local and international partners.

### **Diaspora Relations**

Over the last year, the Diaspora Relations Unit (DRU) has been engaged in extensive personal interaction with Belizeans living abroad, with the understanding that every single Belizean has a role to play in

national development, regardless of place of residency. Additionally, the management of the Diaspora Returnee Incentive Program was successfully transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the MTDR. Over the last year, the MTDR has facilitated donations from the diaspora valued at approximately BZ\$2.5 Million. This includes Hurricane Lisa relief efforts supported by members of the diaspora that amounted to approximately BZ\$1 Million in hurricane supplies, household items, medical supplies and food items that supported over 500 affected families.

Belizeans also traveled home as tourists during and after the pandemic and were able to take advantage of Belizean specials offered by the tourism private sector. Belizeans living abroad are proud of their home and continue to be important ambassadors to promote travel and investment in Belize. They bring friends, share stories, and contribute to the powerful marketing messages that promote travel to Belize, build friendships, and develop interest in supporting the country in countless ways.

## **MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND DIASPORA RELATIONS**

### **Regional Integration**

As part of the government's SICA commitments, the MTDR has received the Pro-Tempore Presidency (PPT) of the Secretaría de Integración Turística Centroamericana (SITCA) from the Dominican Republic for the period January – June 2023. The official transfer of the Presidency took place at the FITUR Tourism tradeshow in Madrid, Spain in January. The Tourism Ministers of the region will be hosted in Belize in April. The MTDR continues to support the regional work plan to include evaluations for consultancies and proposals for marketing campaigns, training courses, and technical assistance. MTDR is also engaged in the Central American Integrated System for Quality and Sustainability (SICCS). SICCS is a regional certification which aims to improve the operation, environmental relationship, and social responsibility of tourism businesses while increasing marketability. This certification will assist businesses in improving the quality of the service offered to tourists and will contribute to making tourism in Belize more sustainable. The Ministry prioritized the car rental and tourism transportation segment for SICCS implementation.

The MTDR continues to represent Belize in the Mundo Maya Organization. The Minister of Tourism signed the revised Constitutive Agreement for the Mundo Maya Organization and coordinated ratification of the agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The MTDR participated in various meetings of the Marketing Committee, Board of Directors, and Regional Commission of the Organization through which valuable input was provided to support the development of cultural tourism.

Belize developed and submitted the logo that was selected to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Mundo Maya Organization.

The Caribbean Tourism Organization received financing from the Caribbean Development Bank to implement the Regional Human Resource Development Knowledge and Skills Audit for Tourism Industry Project. The MTDR coordinated local involvement where Belize had among the highest participation rate in this regional initiative. The main activities of the project were to conduct a regional tourism human resource knowledge and skills audit, which assessed and ultimately enhances the regional competencies of the Caribbean tourism workforce. The results of projects are aimed towards Planners, Strategists, Policy Makers and Tourism Human Resource Managers coming together to address issues which are critical to the region's ability to be truly competitive, sustainable in its development and management and forward thinking in its approach to the future industry needs.

## **Policy and Planning**

The MTDR continues to coordinate Policy and Planning, as every sector is impacted by tourism. Below are some of the policies and plans that the MTDR has been involved in:

- National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan
- Cruise Tourism Policy
- Regional Tourism Policy
- Conservation Investment Strategy
- Medium Term Development Strategy
- National Energy Policy
- Belize National Wastewater Policy
- Mid-Term Assessment of the Implementation of the 10-year National Environmental Policy and Strategy Statement
- Marine Spatial Plan

## **Quality Management System ISO 9001: 2015**



The MTDR is certified under ISO 9001: 2015 and embraces a culture of collaboration with internal and external partners through the conscientious application of a robust and evolving quality management system, driven by internationally recognized best practices, and satisfaction of our development mandate for sustainable and responsible tourism. Our Quality Policy is effective through: Customer Satisfaction, Compliance, Continual Improvement, Communication and Training and Competency. Internal and external audits were completed and the MTDR is in the process of renewing its certification.

## **Sargassum Management**

Sargassum has proven to be a socioeconomic and health threat to visitors and locals. Solutions were examined by the Sargassum Task Force (STF), co-chaired by the MTDR and the Ministry of Blue Economy. Members of the STF also met with the Taiwanese and Japanese who are exploring productive uses of this resource. The Prime Minister, Hon. Johnny Briceno led a delegation to Germany to examine the potential for collaboration and an agreement was subsequently signed with a German firm. The MTDR represented Belize detailing Belize's efforts in dealing with Sargassum in a Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) Regional Webinar – Sargassum: Managing the Threat: Part 2: Sargassum Solutions.

## **Project Execution**

The Sustainable Tourism Program II (STPII) is in its closing phase, and is expected to close off with all pending matters by the end of March. The Matching Grants Program (MGP) was successfully executed. The MGP had 61 beneficiaries from across the country with a project total of BZD \$2,549,000. This was funded by the IDB loan and targeted Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The MGP supported projects of SMEs in the selected project categories:

- Bio-protocol implementation positive and negative externalities.
- Environmental positive and negative externalities.
- Skills development externalities and imperfect information.
- Technology investment and adoption externalities and imperfect information.
- Market intelligence and promotion strategies externalities.
- Potential external economies of scale or scope externalities.

For Safety and Security support, the MTDR, in collaboration with the STPII and the BTB, donated vehicles to enhance coverage and security of tourism destinations:

- 7 vehicles (including Forest Department, the Tourism Police Unit and the Institute of Archaeology)
- 4 UTVs (to Caye Caulker and San Pedro)
- 8 motorcycles
- 10 bicycles

Under the STPII, the Belize City Music Studio was inaugurated in February. The Orange Walk Music Studio is also near to completion. These provide affordable studio access to musicians on an individual or group/band level to foster opportunities for the development of their skills/craft and musical products to sustain their livelihoods and promotion of the Belizean culture.

The Tourism Women Owned MSME COVID-19 Resilience Program was executed in conjunction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Immigration and the Taiwan Technical Mission under the agreement “Enhancing the economic empowerment of women in Latin America and the Caribbean in the COVID-19 post pandemic era” This Technical Assistance for women’s empowerment, entrepreneurship and financial inclusion had 30 beneficiaries in Caye Caulker, Cayo, Hopkins and Placencia, with a project total of BZD \$144,000. Through this project, these MSMEs now find themselves able to elevate their offerings with access to low-cost digital technologies (app-based point-of-sales tools, tablets, mini receipt printers, automatic dispensers) that reduce touch points during the travel experience in Belize and that facilitate digital marketing to effectively reach travellers through engaging content, quality images and videos.

The two-year BZD \$750,000 Garifuna Trail Project is also underway directly benefiting 50 cluster members in Hopkins (30 businesses) and Dangriga (20 businesses). A marketing consultant is presently developing advertisement material for the Garifuna Tourism Trail, including signage and promotional materials.

## **Legislation**

In 2022, the MTDR and the BTB engaged in various legislative works to support the framework for tourism development in Belize.

These included:

- ✓ The drafting of Amendments to the Hotels and Tourist Accommodation Act Subsidiary Legislation to integrate health and safety standards, and adjustments to the substantive legislation to allow for varying hotel tax rates to support domestic tourism in the future.
- ✓ The drafting of Amendments to the Belize Tourism Board Act, primarily to modernize the tour guide and tour operator regulations to promote quality and safety within operations.
- ✓ The drafting of Amendments to the Qualified Retired Persons Act, to modernize the QRP program and to improve its regional competitiveness by introducing an investment window for members of the program.
- ✓ The enactment of a Long Stay Visitor Permit in conjunction with the Immigration and Nationality Department.
- ✓ The enactment of a Hotel Amnesty Program in September 2022, creating a window to incentivize the formalization of unlicensed properties within the tourism sector.

### **Fuel Subsidy Program**

In June 2022, the MTDR, through GOB, accessed funds for a Fuel Subsidy Program for Tour Operators and Tender Operators. This was coordinated through BTB and was executed to mitigate the impacts of inflation and increasing fuel prices that were affecting the industry, particularly during the tourism low season. The Fuel Subsidy Program benefitted over 180 Tour Operators and Tender Operators countrywide and was successfully concluded in October 2022. Approximately, 1.5 Million BZ Dollars was invested back into the industry under this program.

### **Matching Grants Program (Micro and Small)**

In July 2021, the MTDR, through GOB, accessed funds for the Matching Grants Program for Micro and Small Enterprises. This was executed in two phases through the BTB and was issued for the purpose of “Business Recovery and Enhancement for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs)”. In July 2022, the second phase of the program was executed. Some 500 SMEs received assistance amounting to a total value of approximately BZ\$600,000.00.

### **Diaspora Relations**

Engagement with Belizeans diaspora in the United States. In 2022-2023, DRU planned and organized several successful Town Hall meetings and events in Los Angeles, New York, Washington D.C, Atlanta and Tampa. Ministers of Government, including the Prime Minister, had the opportunity to meet with over 600 members of the Belizean diaspora across all these events. Other engagements supported included: Belize Fun Day, Houston; Give Back Day in the Park, Houston; Belize Independence Fest, Los Angeles; Belize Association of San Antonio Meet & Greet, Texas; and Belize Investment & Finance Forum, Washington, D.C.

Other successful programs with the diaspora included: Donate to Educate Campaign – 209 laptops were donated to MOE through Build Belize and members of the diaspora. A total of approximately BZ\$2.5 Million worth of contributions were received from the diaspora, including hurricane relief. Other donors included No Child Hungry; Global Paint; Consulate of Chicago; Ignite Belize; Bread of Life; Friends Helping Friends; Straughan Foundation; Sigler Foundation and Homeless Stand.

Virtual engagement with the diaspora includes resources on the DRU website, Facebook group, newsletter, and the registry. These platforms allow members of the diaspora to remain connected with Belize. The registry allows DRU to collect data, network, restore trust, strengthen relationships, and create a platform for members to share experiences and information. Each member of the diaspora, who registered will get a chance to participate in a land raffle which will be held on March 15, 2023. This land raffle initiative started in January of 2022 and was scheduled to end in December of 2022. Due to hurricane Lisa the Atlanta and Tampa visits were postponed, so the raffle was delayed allowing those who attended town hall meetings in these two cities to participate in the raffle. Regular virtual meetings with embassies, consulates and diaspora groups help to maintain a good working relationship and to communicate upcoming events. The DRIP was successfully transferred to the MTDR from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since September 2022. To date we have received and processed over 100 applicants. The program is designed to facilitate those Belizeans returning home after living in another country for 10 years or more.

MTDR sponsored Belize Watch on Love FM, a series of eight shows featuring Belizeans in the diaspora, specifically in the Miami and Fort Lauderdale areas. These shows were recorded between August 16-23, 2022 and were aired during the month of September. The shows featured 15 Belizeans and looked into their lives, careers, and ways they gave back to Belize and the importance of maintaining their links to Belize. MTDR also sponsored Kruffy Connection, a show hosted by Krem Television. There were four shows per month, recorded from August 2022 to January 2023. The shows highlighted ways Belizeans can make a difference and engaged with Belizeans at home and abroad around topics which included culture, traditions, history, education, business, political rights and other topics.

## **BELIZE TOURISM BOARD**

### **Marketing**

Building on the momentum of the Grab Life campaign introduced in 2021, in 2022 Belize was spotlighted in two major cities – New York and London. Grab Life campaign videos lit up the world-famous Time Square in New York City. In London, 10 fully electric cabs were wrapped in the campaign’s colors and featured the iconic Blue Hole. The cabs also included a QR code to take persons directly to the TravelBelize.org website.

The new and modern **Travel Belize website** also offers travelers the convenience of planning their Belize itinerary and booking their stay. To make it even easier, the website has been fully translated into five languages, representing our key markets.

In 2022, the BTB led a 2-month digital booking campaign with **Expedia** to increase arrivals leading up to Belize’s peak tourist season. The campaign was successful and garnered over \$871,000 US Dollars in gross bookings. A second campaign is being planned for 2023.

As the word gets out about Belize’s pristine natural beauty, we are quickly becoming the go-to destination for celebrities, digital influencers, and brands.

Belize was spotlighted on the cover of the **2022 Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Magazine**. The 12 to 16 page spread featured iconic locations and two key hotels. This was a major visibility boost for Belize given the print publication’s 63 million readers. In addition, a dedicated travel feature, a destination photo gallery, and dedicated travel videos also garnered 359 million page views on their website.

In the same year, Belize also welcomed bespoke travel, lifestyle, and media brand – **Passport Heavy**. In partnership with the BTB, Belize was featured as a unique, adventure-filled destination. Several destinations in Belize were highlighted and the first Belize episode received over 1 million views on their YouTube channel.

The BTB also partnered with an inspirational travel brand, **Global Child**, for the production of a 60-minute English episode for global distribution and international outlets as part of their Season 4 premiere. In addition to a collection of social media content about Belize, an original podcast dedicated to the Belize experience will also be produced.

In 2022, several national co-branded promotions were executed for the US market. These aligned Belize with the most popular brands across broadcast, print, and online mediums - resulting in more than 34 million+ impressions and a publicity value of nearly \$4 million US Dollars. These include promotions with:

Men's Journal  
Woman's World  
First for Women  
Wheel of Fortune  
Live! With Kelly & Ryan

In addition to the co-branded promotions in 2022, the BTB hosted 10 individual media experiences and 1 group media experience which resulted in 72 digital features and 10 print articles yielding 3.9 billion total impressions which have a value of more than \$9 million USD.

At home, the **Belizean Traveller** campaign was relaunched in 2022 with a brand new logo, website, and videos to encourage Belizeans to explore the jewel. Through awareness about all that our country has to offer, the campaign aims to foster an appreciation and stewardship of our resources and to create local ambassadors and travelers.

No longer Mother Nature's best kept Secret, Belize is making its mark on the world stage as we continue to promote our destination at various expos, roadshows, and travel trade events in North America, Europe, and South America. Some trade events attended in 2022 include the New York Wedding Salon Expo, Experience Wellness and Travel Media Event by Organic Spa Magazine, and the USTOA Conference and Marketplace. Belize was also a headline sponsor of the 2022 LATA Expo which included a spectacular "Taste of Belize" event featuring a cooking demonstration from Chef Sean Kuylen and a vibrant cultural performance by Ronald McDonald.

## **Industry Development and Destination Planning**

A well-rounded tourism product is instrumental to the marketing of a destination and the experiences had by visitors. The BTB has focused on enhancing the tourism infrastructure at various destinations, establishing an enabling tourism environment for industry partners, and creating new pockets of tourism activity.

Some major achievements are:

**Placencia Pier:** In collaboration with the Placencia Village Council, the Placencia Municipal Pier was renovated. The project began in January 2022 and the pier was completed and ready for public use in August 2022. Through BTB’s Tourism Signage Program, informational signage was also installed around the Pier.

**Placencia Polyclinic:** In late 2021, the BTB, the Placencia Village Council, and the Ministry of Health and Wellness partnered for the construction of a polyclinic in Placencia Village. The polyclinic is expected to be completed by March 2023.

**Jaguar Paw Road:** In 2022, the Jaguar Paw Road at mile 37 on the George Price Highway was resurfaced and the parking lot area was upgraded. This provides a more convenient access to popular tourist attractions and activities in the area.

**Malacate Road:** In an effort to improve the cruise tourism experience for guests entering Belize through the Harvest Caye Cruise Port, the BTB partnered with the Government of Belize to improve approximately 1 mile of road in Independence Village. BTB’s valued contribution was approximately \$740,000, which will assist in the paving of the road, allowing for faster tour transfers, better access, and improved visitor experience.

**Berger Field:** The old Berger Field located in the heart of Belize City has been upgraded into a 2200 sq. ft. football field. Works included the installation of a FIFA-standard artificial turf, being the first synthetic field in the city.

**Mahogany Street:** As the interest in culinary tourism continues to grow, the Mahogany Street Food Corridor Project was launched in 2022. The first phase of the project is currently underway with the construction of 8 vendor booths, two parking lot areas, and a bathroom.

The merging of tourism, culture and the arts in a country as diverse as Belize presents opportunities for economic development and growth.

**BIMFF:** In July 2022, the first Belize International Music and Food Festival was held in San Pedro, Ambergris Caye. The two-day festival was held to close the gap between Belize’s high and low tourism seasons. The festival featured international and Belizean artists and DJs, and a food fair with delectable local cuisine. The festival fueled economic activity on the island with almost 9,000 attendees at the concert and nearly 7,000 visitors to the island between the 28<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> of July. The festival also pumped close to 5.4 million dollars into the island with hotel stays, transportation, golf cart rentals, and more.

**Seine Bight Police Substation:** Works have begun for the construction of a police substation in Seine Bight Village. The substation will serve to enhance security and safety for tourism in the area.

**Music Strategy:** BTB partnered with global music strategy leaders and Sound Diplomacy to develop a music tourism strategy for Belize. This will include the creation of a marketing framework to amplify Punta Rock into a globally recognized musical genre. Additionally, the BTB supported the establishment of world-class recording studios in Belize to promote the development of the local music industry.

**Branding Exercise:** In 2022, BTB engaged Launchpad Consulting to carry out an in-depth analysis of the strength of the tourism value chain in Belize, and to establish a strategy for the Belize brand to become a part of the value proposition across various sectors. This process led to national consultations in October 2022 and will culminate in early 2023 with the completion of this Brand Development Strategy for Tourism in Belize.

In moving the industry forward, BTB has placed great emphasis on Business Development and Innovation. The following are a few achievements in this regard:



**Hotel Developments:** Since July 2022, the BTB has been working to establish business hotels in Belmopan and Belize City through partnerships between internationally branded hotel chains and public-private partnership groups. BTB is also exploring the creation of financial structures that could facilitate hotel owners' financial assistance to expand room capacity and investment in tourism-related opportunities.

**Investment Platform:** The creation of an information platform where investors can access all relevant information for investment in the tourism sector is also currently underway. Once completed, the platform will include information such as procedures, guides, and updated or real-time data and forms.

**Nautical Tourism:** In the quest to develop Nautical Vessel Tourism, the BTB partnered with the Belize Port Authority for the establishment of 5 new Moorings off the Coast of Placencia into the Gladden Split Area. *SailClear*, the official pre-arrival notification system for nautical vessels was also introduced on August 1, 2022, in collaboration with the Belize Customs Department. A landing page with resources on nautical tourism has also been created on the BTB website. BTB has also partnered with the International Yacht Brokers Association (IYBA) to further develop Belize's nautical tourism industry.

**Cruise Recruitment:** Work to provide access to employment on cruise ships to Belizeans commenced in 2022 with partnerships established with Carnival, Norwegian, and MSC Cruises. Close to 100 Belizeans have been offered employment by the three cruise lines, thus far.

## Capacity Building

The BTB continues to recognize the importance of building capacity of our stakeholders in all sectors of the industry. This is reflected in the variety of trainings that have been offered.

**Tour Guide Training Subsidy:** In 2022, over 500 Belizeans have been able to access the tour guide training program, through a subsidy program implemented by the BTB that facilitates economic access to trainees.

**Digital Summit:** The Digital Marketing Summit is known to be a hub of inspiration and insights by some of the top professional marketers in their respective fields. Presentations from Skift, Google, Expedia

Group, Sakkisme & Co, were just a few that were enjoyed by attendees. A total of 210 persons attended the summit, exceeding the cap of 130 persons.

*Elevate*, a national tourism training program was designed and launched in 2022. This program was based on a value-chain approach and is comprised of 5 sub-programs.

In 2022, 1553 persons were trained with offerings including Instructor and Dive Master Certification, Regulation and Defensive Tactics for Tourism Police Unit and Rangers, and Leadership and Conflict Resolution, among other topics.

Additionally, in October 2022, the BTB hosted its first annual *Elevate Training Expo*, a two-day training event where over 20 courses across all the sub-programs of Elevate, were provided to tourism stakeholders. The expo featured training sessions on 14 different topics catering to various sectors of the industry —Wine Fundamentals, Introduction to Birding, Destination Branding, and The Art of Sales in Tourism were just a few offered. Over 370 persons from across the country attended and benefitted from the Expo.

## **Industry Partnerships & Community Support**

Belize continues to make strides as a leader in conservation and sustainability, increasing our competitive edge as a tourism destination. Several initiatives were supported along these lines:

**Greening Initiative:** The BTB in 2022, designed and partnered with the Belize City Council on an Urban Greening Project, which saw the initiation of an urban uplifting program of Belize City with the addition of landscaping and vegetation interventions in seven zones of the city.

**APAMO:** In February 2022, an MOU was signed between the BTB and the Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations (APAMO) to strengthen the cooperation in the sustainable development of protected areas in Belize. As the single largest management agency for protected areas, APAMO received \$75,000 towards its Sustainable Tourism Program.

**Barrier Reef:** Belize’s Barrier Reef celebrated its 10,000<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2022. The BTB contributed \$15,000 in support of the Marketing and Branding Strategy for the UNESCO World Heritage site.

**Sargassum Clean-up:** Between June and August 2022, the BTB contributed up to \$20,000 per month to assist with cleaning efforts in Sargasso-affected destinations. These included Hopkins, Placencia, Seine Bight, Caye Caulker, and San Pedro Town.

The rebounding of the industry would not have been possible without the tourism industry partners.

The annual National Tourism Awards returned in 2022. The signature event honored and celebrated the excellence of the industry’s top performers for the year. Three new categories were introduced: Green Champion of the Year, Health and Wellness Provider, and Cultural Experience of the Year.

The BTB continues to work in partnership with the Belize Tourism Industry Association, and the Belize Hotel Association by providing support to their marketing and industry initiatives.

The **Frontline Hero Award** program was launched in late 2021. It initially recognized persons who worked on the frontline during the pandemic and has since been extended to include tourism frontline workers who go above and beyond to ensure that visitors have a fun and safe time in Belize.

Every Belizean has a part to play in the development and sustainability of the Belize Tourism Product. In 2022, the BTB launched a **Civic Pride Campaign** to highlight the importance of respect and love for country. The campaign promotes values such as respect for the national anthem and flag, no littering, love for Belize, and protection of our flora and fauna.

## **Recognition for Belize**

Belize continues to attract visitors from across the globe as we frequently make headlines. Long praised for the warmth and hospitality of our people, it was no surprise that the jewel was voted in 2022 as one of the friendliest countries in the World by Conde Nast Traveller.

Several of our hotels were also recognized in TripAdvisor’s Traveler’s Choice 2022 Best of the Best Awards, representing the top 1% of listings on TripAdvisor.

To top it off, Belize continues to be regularly featured in numerous major international publications, including Elle, National Geographic, Forbes, CNN Travel, New York Times, and Travel and Leisure, to name a few.

## **BORDER MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

### **Management**

While cargo continued to move across the borders during the pandemic, the northern and western borders opened for tourists only in May 2021. It was not until January 2022 that these two borders opened for all Belizeans with significant restrictions. In June of 2022, all restrictions were finally removed, allowing for a return to normal at the land borders, including the return of international boat runs from San Pedro and Punta Gorda ports. The return of international buses such as ADO, Linea Dorado and Fuente del Norte are still pending.

In 2022, the BMA focused on strengthening its organizational structure, and made some site improvements. The following were implemented:

1. New BMA logo and colour-scheme adjustments (paint and uniforms)
2. Visitor Flow Survey
3. Establishment of the Central Office in Belmopan
4. Establishment of a site surveillance room (Chocolate Building Belize City)
5. Weekly site managers report system
6. Finance and Asset Control system
7. Employee P-file management system
8. HR Software System acquired
9. Employee Evaluation System

10. Quarterly Site staff meetings
11. Stakeholder satisfaction mechanism
12. Employee database
13. Motor Vehicle Policy
14. Border Specific Staff restructuring
15. BMA Asset Management
16. Training – (Hospitality, First Aid, Security, Special Constable)
17. Amendments to the SI for Fee Collection
18. Cashless Payment for BMA Services & Fees (in progress)
19. New Welcome Desks (in progress)
20. New POS with Mobile readers (in progress)
21. Cargo Management Plan
22. Commercial Rent Agreements

## Site Improvements

### Northern Border

1. Staff Uniforms & ID's
2. Buildings Repainted
3. Site Landscaping
4. Site Vehicle acquired
5. 2 Polaris ATVs repaired
6. Tractor & Bush hog acquired
7. Bathroom renovation underway
8. Camera system installed
9. Trailer and Water cart
10. Building Plans
11. Survey Maps

### Western Border

1. Staff Uniforms & ID's
2. Site Vehicle Repaired
3. Building Painted
4. Bathrooms renovated
5. Landscaping complete
6. Camera System installed
7. Maintenance workshop
8. Building Plans

## 9. Survey maps

### Punta Gorda

- Staff Uniforms & ID's
- New Generator Installed
- Camera System Installed
- Solar lighting system
- ISPS security plan underway
- Building Plans
- Port Gate Replaced

### San Pedro

1. Site Staff Uniforms
2. Golf Cart Repaired
3. Generator Repaired

## CONCLUSION

2022 was a year of strong recovery. 2023 promises to be a year of continued productivity and further growth for our industry. With the return of the regional buses through the land borders, it is expected that overnight arrivals will return to pre-pandemic levels by the end of this year.

In 2023, we aim to revolutionize the tourism industry with a more focused approach to quality-based standards for our industry, innovative marketing campaigns, bold new product and destination development, and higher levels of service through a robust national training program in Belize.

# Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management

## Enabling PlanBelize!

### Overview

The Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Management continues to position itself to truly enable #PlanBelize! It is laser focused on its core mandate of increasing climate change resiliency and comprehensive disaster risk reduction to ensure Belize’s long term sustainable development. This fiscal year, the Ministry is proud to outline its accomplishments!

Belize, through the Ministry was proud to assume the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) Pro Tempore Presidency. During its Presidency, Belize continues to bridge partnership through the CARICOM and SICA sub-regions particularly in areas of climate change and biodiversity protection. The Ministry, as part of its Presidency, hosted the Investment Conference: “Initiative 20 X 20, Bonn Challenge, and AFOLU 2040 Joint Meeting on Restoring Lands” with more than 150 policy makers and investors converging in Belize. During this event, the Ministry launched its National Restoration Strategy highlighting Belize’s restoration ambitions to 2030 while outlining an investment roadmap through its various projects.

In the fiscal year 2022 – 2023, The Ministry established a Policy, Planning and Projects Unit to improve donor coordination and project implementation across departments, strengthen partnerships with other sectors and increase the Ministry’s management effectiveness of its programs and projects. The Unit supports the scaling up of Belize’s global leadership in biodiversity protection, climate change, green finance, and community development. In this fiscal year, the Unit supported the development and alignment of the Ministry’s Strategic Plan to achieve greater results. Furthermore, it supported the coordination of BZD \$17.9 Million dollars in improving biodiversity conservation and protected areas management and enhancing sustainable development priorities.

Within the three portfolios of the Ministry sits ten (10) Units and Departments with the addition of the Solid Waste Management Authority. Below, we share a brief overview of their accomplishments.

The **Department of the Environment** within the Ministry continues to promote long-term environmental sustainability through the strengthening of the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Compliance processes. In addressing the rehabilitation of the New River and other watersheds in Belize, The Department is implementing the Integrated Ridge to Reef of the Mesoamerican Reef Ecoregion Project at a value of \$1.3M BZD through support from its international partners. The DOE also continues to roll out the Phase Out of Single Use Plastics and Styrofoam.

In the fiscal year 2022 – 2023, the **Protected Areas Conservation Trust** closed its 3-year Conservation Investment Strategy which saw investment of \$10.24 Million across the National Protected Areas System. PACT also launched implementation of transitional projects/programs valued at \$3.0 Million in new financing from its Trust Fund and contributed \$500,000 in Hurricane Lisa Recovery efforts to its partners.

The **National Emergency Management Organization** continues to fulfill on its mandate of preserving life and property throughout the country of Belize in the event of an emergency, threatened or real, and to mitigate the impact on the country and its people. Hurricane Lisa impacted our productive sector, infrastructure, and social subsectors accounting for more than \$131M in damages, \$62M in losses with recovery needs estimated to be over \$212M. After the passing of the storm, the NEMO assisted over six thousand two hundred (6, 200) families affected by floods, and house fires with thousands of food packs, water, mattresses, tarps, hygiene kit, cleaning supplies, tabletop stoves and small butane tanks. During the fiscal year, the Department conducted ninety-four (94) training sessions in First Aid, shelter management, logistics supply systems, damage assessments, search and rescue, emergency operations management, and information technology including one (1) national simulation. In improving Belize’s preparedness and readiness for hurricane season, NEMO is in the process of carrying out an After-Action Review and a Comprehensive Disaster Management Audit to strengthen its standard operating procedures and improving national resilience to hazards.

The newly established **National Biodiversity Office** within the Ministry continued to accomplish feats towards supporting the effective management of biodiversity across the country. The NBIO led the



development of the now updated Co-management Agreement that provides clarity to the roles and responsibilities of Government and its partners for enhanced protected areas management. Furthermore, it also streamlined the integration of site level management into national reporting to improve management effectiveness of all PAs. For the first time, twelve (12) Agreements have been signed in the Fiscal Year 2022-2023, and nine more remain in the pipeline for signature in the coming weeks; making it a total of 21 (of 36) sites managed under the new Framework. The Office also led the development of the Biodiversity Impact Investment Tracking Tool with an aim to monitor and direct biodiversity and environmental management investments in Belize. This tool will serve to inform future investment efforts and ensure better alignment and delivery of national targets to enable desired impact. Through resource mobilization efforts, the Office leveraged over \$5M USD over the past year towards biodiversity conservation and management.

The **National Meteorological Service (NMS)** continues to support the collection and distribution of climate and weather information to support the public – especially the productive sectors. During the fiscal year 2022-2023 the Department continues to improve the services offered launching the municipality specific forecasts as well as the relaunching of the nightly television weather broadcast during the hurricane season. The department was able to successfully track and forecast hurricane Lisa and provide timely alerts to the Belizean public, government officials and emergency managers to ensure that there were no casualties resulting from this storm. This was accomplished through the deployment of new equipment including new automatic weather stations and accompanying sensors.

In the 2022-2023 Fiscal year, the **National Fire Services** continues to improve its services for the benefit of the people of Belize. In December 2022, the NFS opened a new state of the art Emergency Dispatch Center at the Belmopan fire station enabling personnel to receive, dispatch and track all emergency calls in the Cayo District. The Department also launched a pilot of its Emergency Medical Services Program providing emergency medical services to residents in the Cayo district. The Ministry continues with its Renovations and Construction program with the Santa Elena, Corozal, and Benque Viejo Del Carmen station investing some \$500,000 for improved service delivery to the Belizean populace. Through partnership, the NFS continues to acquire necessary equipment, training and technology to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. The Ministry also continues to finalize ground work for the construction of the Independence and Placencia Fire Stations slated to commence the latter part of March.

As a response to the BONN Challenge, the Ministry of Sustainable Development through the **Forest Department** launched the National Landscape Restoration Strategy for Belize. The strategy prioritized a total of 130,000 hectares for restoration actions by 2030. This fiscal year, The Department in partnership with the German fund successfully executed the regional project entitled “Protection of the natural resources of the Selva Maya” (Belize-Mexico-Guatemala) whose purpose is the protection and sustainable use of the Maya Forest. The Project is a four-year project worth \$3.6 million BZD. Furthermore, the Department is presently implementing the GEF7 project “Global Wildlife Program: Enhancing jaguar corridors and strongholds through improved management and threat reduction” valued at \$2.4M BZD. The objective of this medium-sized project is to secure jaguar corridors and strengthen the management of jaguar conservation units through reduction of current and emerging threats, development of sustainable wildlife economy and enhanced regional cooperation. The Department continues to prepare the groundwork for results-based payment; the Department through the newly established Monitoring, Reporting and Verification Unit submitted its technical annex report which marks the first biennial update report for Belize. These will verify the availability of carbon credits in the forest sector for Belize which will serve as the platform to enable trading of carbon.

In the 2022-2023 Fiscal Year, the **National Climate Change Office** continues to lead Belize’s policy and practice towards climate adaptability and resiliency. These include: the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement with the Agriculture and Natural Resources Institute (ANRI) in Stann Creek through the National Climate Change Office’s (NCCO) EnGenDER project. This partnerships facilitates the revamping of the existing greenhouse structure to allow for a controlled environment for vegetable crops and to improve productivity and a fertigation tank for crop production complete with a solar-powered water pumping system valued at BZD \$60,000. The project also provided BZD \$80, 000 for the electrification of public spaces in 3 southern communities (Golden Stream, Indian Creek and Medina Bank) to the Ministry of Public Utilities, Energy, Logistics, and E-Governance. Additionally, the Department supported the construction of the Belize Livestock Producers Association silvo-pastoral model farm and assisted in funding the farmer field school to drive a greener and more sustainable livestock industry valued at BZD \$63,873.50. In partnership with the National Hydrological Service and with assistance of Climate Technology Center and Network (CTCN), the NCCO mobilized \$500,000 for the development of a groundwater monitoring system for the improved management of aquifers in Belize. This system will serve as a tool to track the impacts of climate change in the water sector. As a first-of-

its-kind pioneer initiative, The NCCO hosted the Belize Climate Change Week from October 11th to 14th, 2022, at the San Ignacio Resort Hotel. The objective of Belize this initiative was to strengthen national capacities and contribute to the improved knowledge and engagement of Youth, Indigenous People and decision makers to improve resilience to the impacts of climate change.

The **Sustainable Development Unit** continues to work towards ensuring the inclusion of Belize's sustainable development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals within national sector plans and policies. A major achievement of the unit in 2022-2023 fiscal year was the completion and launch of the Plan Belize Medium Term Development Strategy (PBMTDDS) 2022-2026 undertaken in partnership with the Ministry of Economic Development. The PBMTDS and its six major areas will ensure that no one is left behind and that there is clear vision and strategy further articulating and advancing sustainable development priorities within Belize. In addition, through the "Lives in Dignity Project" financed by the European Union, the Ministry in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, completed water rehabilitation projects in Santa Familia, Billy White and Los Tambos Villages to meet "Water and Sanitation Hygiene" standard and drainage projects in Billy White and Los Tambos, benefitting over 3,000 residents. This project is investing BZD \$5.3 M across these communities.

# Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs

## 2022/23 Results/Highlights

### BACKGROUND:

The following results/highlights are presented in accordance and alignment with the Plan Belize Medium Term Development Strategy Strategic Focus Areas. The objectives are i) to demonstrate the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs' strategic alignment to the national development framework, and ii) highlight and report on the Ministry's achievements in fulfilment of Plan Belize. All the relevant strategic focus areas to MHDFIPA are emphasized and sub-focus areas are created to link the work of the Ministry to that of the national development framework.

### STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 1: POVERTY REDUCTION

#### Sub-Focus Area: Social Protection

- Successful launch and commencement of implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Joint Programme on Social Protection in Belize by MHDFIPA, MED, UNICEF, World Food Programme, and International Labour Organization.
- Establishment of MHDFIPA as a member of the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) Operational Group to strength its shock responsiveness strategies. Inclusive of drafted SOPs to include Cash Assistance Elements in the Relief and Supplies Management Committee SOPs for NEMO and delivery of cash assistance to 1600 households affected by Hurricane Lisa via DigiWallet and World Food Programme.
- MHDFIPA in partnership with World Bank successfully completed the evaluation of BOOST+ Programme 2019-2021 cohort document key lessons and recommendations for improvement of the programme.

- MHDFIPA through its partnership with UNICEF completed the drafting of the Child Poverty Study for Belize to understand how poverty affected children from a multidimensional standpoint.
- 5041 HH benefited from social assistance programming offered by MHDFIPA.
- Approximately 4700 households or 15,000 individuals supported with in-kind relief during Hurricane Lisa lead by MHDFIPA.
- Expansion of the wrap around services approach across departments supporting 11,029 individuals through case management support.
- Additionally, 138 helping professionals across the country received training in Suicide Prevention.

## **STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA 2: ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION**

### **Sub-Focus Area: Women Economic Empowerment**

- A total of 6 skills training were implemented during 2022/23 which included sewing Level 1, Sewing Level 2, Sewing Pattern Making, Wait Staff, Hospitality, Group Cross Training and Business Development – Tracking Expenses.
- A total of 60 women were reached through these skill trainings implemented.
- 21 women were provided with Financial Planning Sessions
- 37 women entrepreneurs benefitted from more than \$90,000 in seed funding from the MHDFIPA which partnered with Beltraide and the MSME Roadshow.

## **STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS 4: CITIZEN SECURITY**

### **(a) Sub-Focus Area: Women Empowerment**

- MHDFIPA in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports of Jamaica through the support of UNFPA Belize Liaison Office successfully conducted a South-South Study Tour Exchange of Safe Shelters in both countries. This provides the opportunity for Belize to assess its ability to support nationally.

- managed safe shelters for women affected by GBV.

**(b) Sub-Focus Area: Juvenile Justice**

- Diversion program/service is now fully integrated into the Department's core services country.
- 42 adolescents successfully completed the Diversion program.
- 125 residents countrywide participated in life skills training.
- 225 residents countrywide had some form of tutoring within the reported period.
- 500+ residents and non-residents received some form of counselling with the focus areas in anger, behavioural and conflict management

**(c) Sub-Focus Area: Prevention and Advocacy**

**Early Childhood Development and Parenting:**

- 287 Early Childhood Development-Care for Child Development (ECD-CCD) sessions facilitated.
- 301 RCP parenting programmes facilitated.
- 250 Parents participated in the Parent Enrichment Programme (8 weeks cycle per individual)

**Community Outreach Activities:**

- A total of 5456 persons were reached through advocacy and outreach activities.
- 804 children and adolescents, between the ages of 4-18 years, accessed various educational support, and recreational, or developmental programmes offered at the Hub Resource and Community Centre in Belize City.

**(d) Sub-Focus Area – Institutional Strengthening**

- Capacity of Directors and Mid-managers enhanced through training in grant proposal writing and monitoring and evaluation.
- 100% of middle managers across the Ministry were trained as trainers in fundamental practice skills and new supervision framework to strengthen staff development and service delivery.

- The Youth Hostel evolved its name and programming to New Beginnings Youth Development Centre (NBYDC) to chart a new life course for residents that engage in the facility.
- 100% of NBYDC staff trained in the following areas: Core Correctional Practice (CCP) which are the interactional skills for working with adolescents; Basic First Aid, Fire Safety and Fire Drill, Restrain and Hold, and Trauma Training
- CRD Strategic Plan 2023-2027 developed.
- Ministry of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples Affairs Strategic Plan 2022-2027 developed.

## **Ministry of Public Utilities and Logistics and E-Governance**

### **Main Achievements of the Energy Unit**

The Energy Unit has made major strides in Energy Access. Under the United Arab Emirates Caribbean Renewable Energy Project, a 400kW microgrid was completed in December 2022 which will serve approximately 400 households. This hybrid plant will serve as a beacon and example for future microgrids to be built in Belize and referenced as an important accomplishment within the CARICOM.

In addition, to show the strengthened Energy Access Strategy, Corazon Creek will also receive a 170kw Solar hybrid system scheduled for commissioning in Q1 2024. The Unit was also able to sign an agreement with BEL to undertake the construction an additional 3 microgrids, as funded by the EU, that will serve 5 villages in Belize with a completion date of 2024.

The Ministry of Public Utilities, Energy, Logistics and E-Governance has partnered with the Belize Bureau of Standards in developing and piloting Energy Efficiency Standards and Labels. These labels will be specific to Belize and will give consumers the power to select appliances that best suites their needs. As a phase one, this program will start with refrigerators but will be extended to air conditioners and lights bulbs by 2024.

Energy Efficiency is also being extended into the transportation sector by the inauguration of the Pilot Project - E-Mobility Public Transportation Project. This project is being executed in partnership with the National UNDP office consisting of deploying 2 electric buses in Belize City and 3 Electric buses on the western corridor between Santa Elena and Belize City, including Belize City to Corozal. The objective of this pilot project is to determine which technology works within Belizean context and to formulate a business plan with on the ground data to determine the return on investment so that operator can access financing and improve the public transportation sector.

### **Main Achievements of the E-Governance & Digitalization Unit by Program**

#### **Developing Shared Services and Infrastructure**

*“Delivering on #Plan Belize”*



Building infrastructure and shared platforms to support the Digital Agenda programs in developing national digital solutions to create an efficient, citizen-oriented, and transparent government.

#### Project #5 – Belize’s National ID Roadmap and Implementation Plan

The Belize National Identification System is a critical pillar to enable reliable online authentication of users necessary for access to online services. Due to the necessity for more reliable methods of online verification, the Belize National Identification System has elevated to the top of the government's list of priorities. A National Identification System collects and validates identity attributes such as name, age or date of birth to establish a person’s identity and provide a proof of identity for them to be able to access services, goods, and opportunities. It provides a unique, reliable, verifiable, and secure way of authenticating an individual’s identity. Its role is to answer three basic questions:

- i. Who are you?
- ii. Are you who you claim to be?
- iii. Are you authorized or eligible for something?

With the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, the E-Governance and Digitalization Unit under the Ministry of Public Utilities, Energy, Logistics, and E-Governance executed the development of a National Identification

Roadmap. The strategic action plan details the approach, implementation plan, budget, and institutional arrangement for the successful development of Belize’s National ID system and pilot a digital ID for online services.

The Cabinet has endorsed the National Identification Roadmap, implementation plan and budget for the launch and implementation of the National Identification Project.

## 2. In Progress

To facilitate the adoption and utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in government, the Digital Agenda identified critical cross-functional platforms that could support the government's delivery of services. In particular, the Digital Agenda highlighted the need to support the government's human resource management and services to optimize the government's allocation of resources and drive internal digital transformation.

Through a consultative process with the HRMIS Unit and their internal administrative officers, the E-Governance and Digitalization Unit under

#### Project #2 – Police Electronic Record Management System

The Application for a Record of Conduct, commonly known as a "Police Record," is one of the most frequently utilized government services in the nation of Belize. While applying for a job or other official documents, you must submit the Record of Conduct. The administrative process is currently concentrated at the Belmopan Police Station and is entirely manual for Record of Conduct applications

To increase access and efficiency and reduce costs, it is necessary to automate the delivery of the service by the Police Department. As a result, this will improve the effectiveness of revenue collection from Record of Conduct Applicants and expedite the delivery.

The E-Governance and Digitization Unit (EDGU) has agreed to assist and build an application that will improve the processing of these records along with improving the delivery of the documents. Automated validation of the applicants' information can be done against the Social Security and Immigration database. The system is currently being analyzed and information is still being gathered. Soon to commence will be the development of the first product of this application.

#### Project #4 –Launch of the Civil Registry Project

The Attorney General's Office, supported by the EDGU, is working towards enhancing Belize's Civil Registry (The Vital Statistics Unit). An effective Civil Registry System is crucial in ensuring an individual's right to a legal identity. The system should support the development of vital

statistics by covering all live births, deaths, marriages, and adoptions occurring in an area. To achieve a well-functioning and efficient civil registry, the Unit designed a comprehensive digital transformation program with the following objectives:

To strengthen the legal environment in Belize relating to vital events to align with best practices;

To strengthen the human resources and IT infrastructure to support a modern civil registry system;

To increase birth registry coverage and awareness of all services;

To simplify and re-engineer the business process of all services;

To support the transition to a full online application platform;

To improve the general public's perception of the Vital Statistics Unit; and

To promote collaboration and interoperability between public sector agencies

## **Ministry of Home Affairs and New Growth Industries**

### **BELIZE POLICE DEPARTMENT - WORK/ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2022**

In February 2022, the department inaugurated the Cyber Crime Centre and Digital Forensics Laboratory. The centre is equipped with the resources necessary to investigate the rapidly increasing instances of cybercrimes.

86 Police Officers received scholarships to complete an internationally recognized certification in Digital Forensics and as First Responders to cyber related crimes.

Under the guidance of the department's curriculum advisor, work commenced on the creation of a new self-sustainable Gang Education Curriculum for Primary and High Schools that seeks to replace the GREAT Program that was previously funded by the US Embassy.

In October 2022, the 'Rethinking Police Management Pilot Project' was launched in Belize City. It is geared at getting input from the lower ranks of the police department, as well as the public, to ascertain the quality of leadership within the department and the quality of services being delivered with a view to improving the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the department.

The department received 150 new body cameras in 2022, through the Belize Taiwanese Embassy & Tourism Board, that will increase transparency and accountability as it relates to police interaction with members of the public.

In November 2022, Recruit Squad #96 was enlisted at the National Police Training Academy.

Further strengthening of the FTO Component of Recruit Training took place which included the procurement of dedicated resources to improve the efficiency of the program.

The CBSI Connect System was also further expanded which included installations in Ladyville, Benque Viejo and Dangriga.

Expansion of the Professional Standards Branch was also made possible through collaboration with the US Embassy.

In December 2022, the National CompStat Office was officially opened to assist in identifying crime patterns and trends within specific areas of the country, and to enable commanders to deploy their resources more effectively.

2,173 Officers from across the country participated in Trainings, Meetings, Workshops, Seminars, Symposiums and Conferences which served to build capacity and expand the collaboration and strengthen partnerships between the department and its agencies both local and abroad.

At the end of 2022 murder rate decreased to 113 murders as compared to 125 murders in 2021. Great policing efforts moved Belize from the third highest murder rate to eleventh (11<sup>th</sup>) amongst Latin America and Caribbean region and for the first time in a decade Belize has dropped out of the top 10 most violent countries in the region.

There were 100 nationwide complaints registered in 2022. 26 were unsubstantiated and counted among those that were concluded, 23 cases are currently awaiting trial and 51 are still under investigation, 27 officers were dismissed.

In October 2022, two officers from the K9 Unit were trained in Colombia as certified dog handlers.

ATIP participated in various operations along with different agencies to target areas susceptible to trafficking in persons as well as conduct proactive operations to counter human smuggling. As a result, 60 persons of various nationalities were detained with 2 victims of trafficking in persons being identified.

In 2022, the department managed to seize 406,965 grams of cannabis, 9,587.29 grams of cocaine and 8,944 grams of methamphetamine and 964 persons were arrested in relation to these seizures.

In 2022, the department managed to seize 222 firearms along with a total of 9,252 rounds of assorted ammunition and 183 persons were arrested in relation to these seizures.

Vehicles acquired for 2022 - (20) Motorcycles & (35) Motor Vehicles.

New Buildings for 2022 were: COMPSTAT & (3) New donated buildings for DCU/PSB/TSU. Renovated were Gales Point Police Station, Arenal, St. Margaret & Kitchen Roof at PTA which took flight during hurricane Lisa.

### **Major Accomplishments by the Belize National Forensic Science Service For the Year 2022**

1. Processed over 3,500 crimes scenes countrywide for both summary and indictable offences.
2. Performed 605 forensic postmortem examinations for medicolegal cases from across the country.
3. Analysed over 1,000 cases at the Forensic Laboratory and issued over 1,000 forensic expert reports for firearms, serology, toxicology and seized drugs cases combined.
4. Supported 13 fingerprint identifications for burglary, robbery and murder cases.
5. Confirmed 12 ballistic matches for firearms cases including murders, shootings and gang membership offences.
6. Outsourced 17 DNA cases totalling to over \$100,000.00 BZD for urgently needed forensic DNA testing to an accredited laboratory in the USA as part of active criminal casework (for murder, sexual assault, missing person, stabbing, wounding and drug plane landing investigations).
7. Increased the NFSS staff complement of forensic science practitioners by over 10%.
8. Acquired a network file server for Scenes of Crime Unit through the InfoSegura Project that will allow for improved data security, modernized digital information storage and a centralized, accountable, and long-term electronic casefile system for all crime scene examinations in the Belize District.
9. Acquired advanced histopathology equipment for the Medical Examiner's Office through the SICA I-Crime Project that will strengthen death investigations for medicolegal cases.

10. Acquired advanced toxicology equipment for the Forensic Laboratory through the SICA I-Crime Project that will expand the scope of analysis in forensic toxicology for criminal investigations.
11. Acquired advanced evidence storage and drug detection equipment for the Forensic Laboratory through the CABEI Belize Integral Security Programme.
12. Acquired funding to install a modern Laboratory Information Management System at the Forensic Laboratory through the InfoSegura Project to improve data security, data integration and digitalization of processes at the Laboratory.
13. Acquired new crime scene cameras through the InfoSegura Project to add to the inventory of crime scene equipment maintained by the Scenes of Crime Unit.
14. Launched a consultancy project to modernize Belize's laws that pertain to medicolegal death investigations by replacing a Coroner-led system with a Medical Examiner-led system.
15. Invested in a new cadaver cold storage unit to adequately and securely store bodies that are awaiting post-mortem examination.
16. Organized and hosted the Third Belize Forensic Science Symposium, supported by the InfoSegura Project, for a local and international audience comprising of over 300 forensic, legal, judicial, medical and law enforcement practitioners from 29 countries across the world.
17. Invested in staff training for NFSS forensic experts on stress, burnout and vicarious trauma to build resiliency in self-care and mental wellbeing.
18. Supported the training of Police and other local Law Enforcement agencies in proper evidence collection and handling, crime scene examination, forensic investigations, crime scene management, and ballistic intelligence.
19. Solidified partnerships with the Ariel Rosado Foundation, University of Belize, Galen University, the US Fulbright Program, and Rutgers University in New Jersey to advance local efforts in building capacity in forensic examinations, cold case investigations, and in promoting careers in Forensic Science for young Belizeans.
20. Commenced implementation of an INL/CARSI-funded project to construct two new Scenes of Crime Field Offices in Belmopan and Dangriga which will significantly improve crime scene processing and evidence management in these areas.
21. Continued the implementation of quality control and quality assurance measures across the department pertaining to crime scene inspections, forensic autopsies, laboratory analysis of evidence, and exhibit management for criminal cases countrywide, supported by the ICITAP agency of the US Department of Justice and the INL agency of the US State Department. An excerpt from page 15 of the May 2022 ICITAP ***Belize Forensic Assessment Report*** reads, \_\_ “The NFSS has made noteworthy progress towards capacity building and accreditation readiness by implementing many of the recommendations made following the forensic assessment in 2018. The laboratory has invested significant time toward

*developing numerous quality documents, including standard operating procedures, decision protocols, interagency policies, training and quality manuals, and agency charter. Infrastructure and equipment upgrades have been prioritized and actioned when possible, and the staff throughout the agency demonstrate a high level of engagement and motivation toward accreditation.” \_*



# Ministry of Economic Development and Investment

## Climate Finance Unit (CFU)

### Ongoing Projects:

#### **Resilient Rural Belize Programme – USD 20,000,000**

With funding from the GCF, IFAD and co-finance provided by GOB, RRB aims to increase the economic, social, and environmental resilience of smallholder farmers, thus creating the conditions for farmers to have a sustainable market access for their produce. The programme promotes climate-smart agricultural production, investing in climate proof infrastructure, supporting producer associations, and strengthening value chains to reinsert smallholder farmers as reliable, competitive suppliers of domestic produce in Belize. It is intended to run until March 2024.

#### **Energy Resilience for Climate Adaptation Project (ERCAP) – USD 11,975,000**

With financing from the Global Environment Facility, World Bank, Belize Electricity Limited and the Government of Belize. The aim of ERCAP is to enhance resilience of the energy system to adverse weather and climate change impacts through long-term planning and capacity-building for adaptation and implementation of demonstration measures targeting the electricity transmission and distribution networks.

**Sub-Total – US\$31,975,000**

### **Readiness:**

- ✓ **Traditional Savanna Fire Management Readiness Proposal to facilitate Emissions Reductions in the AFOLU sector in Belize – USD 400,000.**

Belize identified AFOLU (including forest fires) as an important threat that would be aggravated by climate change. One of the key strategic aims identified was to “ensure the conservation, utilization and sustainable use of forest resources” by properly managing forest fires. Strengthening forest fire management and response and facilitating local level partnerships with communities are also

prominent in Belize’s strategy. Project lead has been identified and implementation of activities will commence in March 2023.

✓ **Building Capacity for Climate Resilient Infrastructure and Sustainable Urban Land Management and Strengthening the Capacity of the Ministry of Economic Development for pre-Accreditation to the Green Climate Fund – USD 998,307.**

This proposed Readiness grant is a two-tier proposal, (1) building the human resource capacity, policies and structures of the NDA, in its pursuit of seeking accreditation from GCF to become a Direct Access Entity; and (2) develop the strategic framework and institutional capacity of the Belize Association of Planners (BAP) and the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Housing (MIDH) to guide the country in achieving climate resilient human settlements and infrastructures. TORs are being developed for the hiring of a project development specialist for MED, and project manager for PACT.

**Sub-Total – US\$1,398,307**

**Project Preparation Facility:**

The GCF provides a project preparation facility to help countries put together full funding proposals. This technical assistance aids in gathering necessary data, writing a strong concept note, and completing any studies that may be required to submit the full proposal.

**Project Preparation Facility:**

- **Integrated Flood Management in the Upper Belize River Watershed – USD 671,221.**

The Government of Belize, through its local government, the San Ignacio/Santa Elena Town Council and its partners, are intent in procuring additional funds through the GCF, to upgrade the drainage network in flash-flood prone areas of the San Ignacio and Santa Elena municipalities. Part of the funds will be used to finance the upgrade of drainage networks, pollution remedial treatment infrastructure, climate risk communication measures, and a comprehensive public awareness and education programme

on climate risk management. These activities will be supported by a multi-disciplinary team from various specialised agencies and implanted via an integrated and participatory approach.

- **Building the capacity of sugarcane farmers in northern Belize – USD 600,000**

The outputs of the project that will lead to the desired scalability includes the following: Development of seed cane nurseries for climate resilient varieties along with transformative systems to ensure that seeds for identified varieties are available to all farmers that need to re-plant their fields since majority of fields depend on one variety of sugarcane. Also, the capacity of contractors will be strengthened to undertake climate resilient replanting activities. The introduction of new technologies and climate smart agronomic practices such as irrigation, mechanical harvesting, and soil regenerative practices.

**Sub-Total – US\$1,271,221**

**National Adaptation Plans:**

Using the USD 3 million in readiness grant funding provided by the GCF for national adaptation planning, Belize is undertaking three readiness projects focused on producing a holistic national adaptation (NAP) strategy for the country. We are implementing a phased approach, whereby 7 sectors will be addressed over 3 projects: phase 1 – NAPs will be produced for the water sector and coastal zone & fisheries sector, and phase 2 – a multisectoral NAP will be produced to address 5 other priority sectors.

- **National Adaptation Planning for Integrated Water Resources Management in Belize – USD 902,937.**

This readiness request will support Belize in addressing key challenges which are necessary for comprehensive adaptation planning in the water sector. Outcomes include a national adaptation plan and Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework for water resources management; analyses on Climate impacts and coastal influences on ground water resources to inform adaptation solutions for improved decision making; Observation, monitoring and forecasting systems for integrated water resources; and concept notes to be developed for adaptation priorities. This NAP Readiness is expected to be completed in 2023.

- **Enhancing adaptation planning and increasing climate resilience in the coastal zone and fisheries sector of Belize – USD 600,000.**

This Readiness seeks to increase the resilience of the coastal zone and fisheries sector through improved climate data and information gathering, monitoring and dissemination, assessments of impacts of climate change on select communities, mainstreaming of climate change considerations into the relevant plans and policies and strengthening of coastal and fisheries communities and organizations communication network for appropriate climate response. The activities under this readiness will provide important baseline information for building coastal resilience and improving adaptive capacity for fishing communities. A completed NAP document and concept notes are key outputs under this readiness. The project is expected to be completed in 2023.

**Sub-Total – US\$1,502,937**

#### **Pre-Accreditation Support:**

In order to access funds from the GCF, countries must work with an accredited entity who has been vetted by the Fund, meets all the fiduciary and administrative requirements, and has the institutional capacity to oversee the implementation of project and programmes in country. PACT is the only national accredited entity as of now, but GOB has identified BSIF, DFC and MED as potential entities to successfully seek accreditation and build our national capacity to engage with the GCF.

#### **23. Enhancing Access for Climate Finance Opportunities, through pre-accreditation support to Belize Social Investment Fund (BSIF) and Ministry of Economic Development (MED) and technical support for Belize National Protected Areas System (BNPAS) Entities, Belize – USD 600,000.**

This project will provide technical support to the Belize Social Investment Fund (BSIF) and the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) in seeking GCF accreditation. In addition, the Belize National Protected Areas System (BNPAS) Entities Belize will receive technical support for project preparation to access climate finance. The Ministry of Economic Development has received a Communications

Officer under this readiness to develop a communication strategy for the NDA on climate adaptation and implementation is underway to conduct a gap assessment for MED accreditation.

**24. Belize Development Finance Corporation Capacity Strengthening for Accreditation to the Green Climate Fund – USD 498,902.**

Seeking DFC accreditation will help support the private sector and MSMEs in accessing concessionary loans and other non-grant instruments in addition to the grants and technical assistance accessed through the other national AEs. The Readiness project provides technical support to strengthen the operational policies of the DFC to enable compliance with GCF accreditation requirements. The project outputs will include an investment management policy, asset and liability committee, environmental and social management system, and an internal audit policy and procedures. Consultants are reviewing procurement policy and providing credit rating to DFC as one of the last deliverables.

**Sub-Total – US\$1,098,902**

**GRAND TOTAL – US\$37,246,367**

**Climate Finance Unit in FY 2022/23**

**Overview**

The Climate Finance Unit (CFU) was created as a result of COP26, with a mandate to increase Belize’s capacity to access climate finance. The CFU has been operational since January 2022 and is staffed by a Director, Economist, Proposal Development Officer, Communications Officer and a Monitoring &

Evaluations Officer. Since April 2022, the CFU has accessed a total amount of <sup>1</sup>USD 7,515,337 in climate finance, with an additional <sup>2</sup>USD 12,847,115 in projects under review and pending approval.

The Ministry of Economic Development under CEO Osmond Martinez was appointed by Cabinet as the National Designated Authority for two climate funds, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Adaptation Fund (AF). Consequently, the portfolio for these two funds now falls under the mandate of the CFU.

## **Green Climate Fund**

The Green Climate Fund makes up the majority of projects in the CFU’s portfolio. Since April 2022, we have accessed a total of USD 3,485,337 in GCF grant funding for projects under different funding windows:

### **12. Project Preparation Facility:**

The GCF provides a project preparation facility to help countries put together full funding proposals. This technical assistance aids in gathering necessary data, writing a strong concept note, and completing any studies that may be required to submit the full proposal. Since 2022, we have accessed USD 671,221 in PPF funding for national projects.

*10. Integrated Flood Management in the Upper Belize River Watershed (USD 671,221) – Focus on flood mitigation measures in San Ignacio/Santa Elena. Soft launch of the project was held in February 2023.*

### **13. National Adaptation Plan (Readiness):**

Using the USD 3 million in readiness grant funding provided by the GCF for national adaptation planning, Belize is undertaking three readiness projects focused on producing a holistic national adaptation (NAP) strategy for the country. We are implementing a phased approach, whereby 7 sectors will be addressed over 3 projects. In phase 1, two NAPs will be produced for the water

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<sup>1</sup> Projects that have been approved or ongoing since April 2022 to present – this figure does not include projects approved prior to April 2022 which are still ongoing.

<sup>2</sup> Projects currently under review by funding agencies and pending board approval. Does not include proposed/pipeline projects.

sector (USD 902,937) and coastal zone & fisheries sector (USD 600,000) and phase 2 – a multisectoral NAP will be produced to address 5 other priority sectors (USD 1,487,030 – approved in February 2023).

14. **Accreditation (Readiness):** Currently, PACT is the only national accredited entity to the GCF. They are accredited to access grant funding for projects valued up to USD 10 million. To complement PACT’s work and to build our national capacity to access climate finance, GOB has identified the Belize Social Investment Fund, Development Finance Corporation, and the Ministry of Economic Development as potential entities to successfully seek accreditation.

- *“Enhancing Access for Climate Finance Opportunities, through pre-accreditation support to Belize Social Investment Fund (BSIF) and Ministry of Economic Development (MED) and technical support for Belize National Protected Areas System (BNPAS) Entities, Belize” (USD 600,000) – Communications Officer hired to produce communications strategy and consultants hired to produce an MED Gap Assessment to pursue GCF accreditation. BSIF is in the process of drafting a strategic plan as part of their accreditation support.*
- *Traditional Savanna Fire Management to facilitate Emissions Reductions in the AFOLU sector in Belize (USD 400,000) – Project lead has been identified and implementation to commence March 2023.*
- *Building Capacity for Climate Resilient Infrastructure and Sustainable Urban Land Management and Strengthening the Capacity of the Ministry of Economic Development for pre-Accreditation to the Green Climate Fund (USD 998,307) – Project development specialist to be procured for MED; strategic framework to be developed for Belize Association of Planners; Project Manager for PACT to be procured.*

## Officers

Since 2022, two new officers have joined the CFU – a communications officer and a monitoring & evaluation officer.

- *Ms. Nicole Zetina (Comm.)* was hired to conduct a preliminary analysis of climate change communications in country and devise a strategy for improving communications on climate

change adaptation in Belize. To date, she has delivered a capacity building training session for MED staff and developed a first draft communications strategy.

- **Mr. Denham Chuc (M&E)** was hired to support the CFU in producing, updating and maintaining databases, tracking climate finance flows within the CFU, and supporting decision-making with regard to climate projects.

## **Notable Events**

4. In 2022, a delegation from Belize, including the NDA attended a GCF event in South Korea where a bilateral meeting was held. Outcomes of this meeting include: confirmation that project “Building the adaptative capacity of northern sugarcane farmers” will be tabled during the GCF Board meeting in 2023; fast-tracking approval of the multisectoral NAP; PPF support for the project “Enhancing Flood Risk Management at the Municipal level in the Belize River Basin.”
5. In 2023, Leroy Martinez (Econ.) attended a Fire Forum in Australia. His participation was a result of a bilateral meeting between the NDA and the International Savannah Fire Management Initiative (ISFMI) during the GCF event in 2022. Outcomes of this forum include: new opportunities for Belize to access carbon credits from savannas in Belize using traditional savanna management practices; NDA, Forest Department and ISFMI will do pilots and collect necessary information for the development of a national or international proposal for submission to the GCF in the 4th quarter of 2023; potential exchange program between Australia and Belize to occur.
6. In February 2023, the CFU hosted the first launch of Belize’s Country Programme for Engagement with the GCF. The country programme highlights priority sectors and initiatives for adaptation and mitigation, including a pipeline of medium- and lower-priority projects to be submitted as funding proposals to the GCF. It has been endorsed by Cabinet and published by the GCF.

## **Main Achievements of Policy and Planning Unit**

### **CDB SIF III Additional Loan**



CDB has approved financing not exceeding US \$1,262,400 to the Government of Belize, sourced from the CDB’s Special Fund Resources (SFR). The loan was approved by the CDB Board of Directors on December 9, 2022, and will be complemented by counterpart resources of BZ \$886,200.

The purpose of the loan is to cover additional costs associated with the following four (4) outstanding community sub-projects: Corazon Creek Technical High School Building, Cristo Rey RC Pre-Primary and Primary School Construction Sub-project, Libertad/Concepcion Rural Water System (continuation); and the Dorothy Menzies Child Care Center Buildings and Ancillary Works.

**CDB Resilient Rural Belize Loan**

CDB has approved financing not exceeding US \$5.0 million to the Government of Belize, sourced from the CDB’s Special Funds Resources (SFR) to support the financing of the infrastructure component of the Resilient Rural Belize Programme. The loan was approved by the CDB Board of Directors on December 9, 2022.

The purpose of the loan is to provide additional funds for the rural infrastructure component of the Resilient Rural Belize Programme, currently financed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The additional funds will help to cover increased construction costs associated with the rehabilitation of the 29.5 miles of road (*see table below*).

**List of Identified Roads**

Road to Nago Bank, Belize District	3.0 miles
San Felipe to San Carlos, Orange Walk District	14.3 miles
Maskall to Bomba, Belize District	1.2 miles
Cow Pen, Stann Creek District	2.0 miles
Trio, Toledo District	2.0 miles
Santander to Valley of Peace Cayo District	3.0 miles
Santa Cruz to San Jose, Toledo District	2.0 miles
San Jose to Farmer’s Cooperative Land, Toledo District	2.0 miles
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29.5 miles</b>

**CDB DFC 9th Line of Credit (LOC)**

GOB requested the allocation of 12.5 million of the SDF 10 funds to a consolidated line of credit for

the DFC to support the onlending of larger loans to the private sector. DFC requested an additional 12.5 million from the OCR for total consolidated LOC of 25 million. The appraisal is underway and given some pending issues with the completion of the OCR portion, the DFC has requested a reduction in scope with only the SFR funds in order to advance the process.

### **CDB DFC Education Loan**

The CDB and DFC have signed a 6 million USD loan secured for the purpose of financing student loans. The loan has been signed by the parties and a guarantee agreement is being finalized between the GOB and CDB.

### **CDB Trade Facilitation Program**

In February of 2022, the Government of Belize and the Caribbean Development Bank signed onto 3 project agreements aimed at facilitating trade.

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Expected Duration</b>	<b>Amount (BZ)</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Development of a Risk-based Sanitary/ Phyto-sanitary Import and Export Control System for Belize - BAHA</b>	<i>Feb. 22 – Mar. 23</i>	<i>\$514,710</i>	<i>TDD Extension Request to Dec. 23</i>
<b>Enhancement of the National Quality Infrastructure - Bureau of Standards</b>	<i>Nov. '21* – Sep. 22</i>	<i>\$383,163</i>	<i>TDD Extension Request to Dec. 23</i>
<b>Enhancing the Capacity of the Government of Belize to Facilitate Trade – Directorate-General for Foreign Trade</b>	<i>Feb 22 – Jan 23</i>	<i>\$805,120</i>	<i>TDD Extension Request to March 2024</i>

### **World Bank (WB) – Climate Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture Project (CRESAP)**

In September of 2022, government signed a US\$25 million loan with the WB for the CRESAP. The purpose of the project is increase agricultural productivity and the adoption of climate-smart agricultural approaches among project beneficiaries, and to respond effectively to an eligible crisis or emergency.

Main achievements to date include the hiring of staff for the project management unit, the formation of the project steering committee, and the development of the draft project operational manual and the draft matching grants manual.

### **WB COVID-19 Response Project**

In July of 2022, government signed a loan agreement with the WB for US \$6.2 million to assist with the acquisition and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines.

The MOHW is currently in the process of procuring vaccines under the project, and the temporary recruitment of healthcare workers to assist in vaccine deployment has started. Also, tenders for the procurement of related medical and IOT equipment will be launched in early March.

### **WB Port Digitalization Study**

A Consultant was hired by the World bank to conduct a study for the digitization of the Belize Maritime Sector. We are waiting on the final report to be shared with the Ministry.

### **WB Belize Renewable Energy Integration and Power System Resilience Project**

In October of 2022, government requested financial and technical assistance from the WB to support the development of a renewable energy project. The purpose of the project is to achieve energy security and independence, while reducing the cost of energy.

Several in-country missions have been held with government and other relevant counterparts to start the process of project development.

## **WB Executive Directors Visit**

The government hosted a delegation of WB Executive Directors between February 18 – 21, 2023. The purpose of the visit to afford the delegation a chance to witness, first hand, Belize’s small state context and the development challenges. The visit is expected to strengthen Belize’s case for IDA eligibility, which would provide access to highly concessionary financing to support our development agenda.

## **IDB – Establishment of the Central Executing Unit (CEU)**

A CEU has been established in MED, the purpose of which is to serve as a central body through which IDB projects are implemented. This centralization is expected to solve issues around the scarcity of project personnel and promote the efficient use of same.

So far, the unit has been staffed with the following positions:

- i. 1 Administrative Officer
- ii. 2 Financial Specialist
- iii. 2 Procurement Specialist and
- iv. 1 Procurement Assistance
- v. 1 Social and Environmental Specialist
- vi. Project Manager for BL-L1038 Strengthening of Public Expenditure management (SPEM)
- vii. Project Manager for BL-L10 Digital Innovation to Boost Economic Development in Belize
- viii. Project Manager for BL-L1041 Sustainable and Inclusive Belize
- ix. Project Manager for BL-L1042 Promoting Sustainable Growth in the Blue Economy Program

## **IDB New Investment Loans**

On February 21, 2023, government and the IDB signed the following three loans.

1. Trade and Investment Facilitation Project (US \$8,000,000): The general objective of the project is to promote Belize’s foreign direct investment (FDI) and trade performance. The specific objectives are to: i) improve investment facilitation through simplification, standardization, and

automation of key investment procedures; ii) improve the investment promotion tools and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) internationalization through the strengthening of the trade and investment institutional apparatus; and iii) improve trade facilitation through simplifying, standardizing, and automating key trade processes.

2. Sustainable and Inclusive Belize Project (US \$15,000,000): The general objective of this project is to improve incomes and promote sustainable livelihoods in the agriculture and tourism sectors. The specific objectives are to improve Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) competitiveness, climate resilience, and environmental sustainability.
3. Digital Innovation to Boost Economic Development in Belize Project (US \$10,000,000): The objective of the project is to increase productivity among MSMEs in Belize. The specific objectives are to: (i) stimulate MSME increase in sales and efficiency through digital transformation; and (ii) increase the supply and access to digital services for MSMEs.

## **IDB Pipeline Projects**

The following projects are currently nearing the completion of the development phase with the bank. Several missions have been held over the past few months as a part of the process.

1. Promoting Sustainable Growth in the Blue Economy (US \$7,000,000): The general objective of this investment operation is to promote the development of a sustainable of a more diversified fishing portfolio by experimentally testing and empirically assessing economic, technical, social, and natural resource management viability as well as the required feasibility measures for that purpose; and to identify scale-appropriate, optimal value chain investments.
2. Water Supply and Modernization Program (US \$11,000,000): The project's objective is to increase access to water services in peri-urban and rural areas; and (ii) improve the planning capacity and the operational and financial performance of BWSL in selected service areas with a focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation.
3. Water and Sanitation Program for Rural Areas (US \$4,000,000): The general objective of this project is to expand access to safe and potable water to rural communities.

4. Skills for the Future Project (US \$15,000,000): This project has dual objectives of closing learning and access gaps that widened during the pandemic; and preparing tomorrow's workforce for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4iR) to build on the accomplishments of the bank's other ongoing education project (the Education Quality Improvement Project).

**UN SDG Joint Programme – Resilient Belize through Sustainable Social Protection:** The Joint Programme was launched in partnership with the Government of Belize on 8 April 2022 covering the two (2) year period from 2022-2023 with a total investment of USD 990,400. The Joint Programme targets two main outcomes by 2024 which include (i) strengthening the resilience of vulnerable and poor groups by establishing a responsive Social Protection Strategy with a Social Protection Floor, and (ii) strengthening local economic development (LED) and livelihoods in targeted municipalities.

During its first year of the JP, UNICEF has engaged with the GOB in a consultation process to determine a nationally agreed upon definition of a Social Protection Floor (SPF) to be embedded in the Social Protection (SP) strategy. An International Expert in Public Financial Management and SPF, engaged with key stakeholders of the Social Protection sector to reflect on the SP landscape and opportunity to establish a sustainable SPF.

Further, there have been advancements on the preparatory work to the cost assessment exercise for the implementation of the unemployment insurance, conducted in close collaboration with the Social Security Board, that is benefiting from the opportunity to, on a parallel project, conduct a comprehensive actuarial valuation to all the social insurance systems.

Also, the selection study to identify 2 strategic value chains for economic growth and employment creation with a focus on the inclusion of women and youth is ongoing. The first step is to support the recovery and growth of MSMEs and to promote social inclusion in Belize, with a focus on women, youth and other vulnerable target groups.

**World Food Programme – Implementation of a Social Protection Insurance Facility/Disaster Risk Financing:** In the area of Disaster Risk Financing (DRF), a Memorandum of Agreement was signed between WFP and the Government of Belize through the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development & Investment to introduce a top-up facility of \$100,000 USD per year for direct cash transfers to affected

families, to be mobilized in the event that its sovereign Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF SPC) is activated by its Tropical Cyclone and Excess Rainfall Policies for the 2022/23 and the 2023/24 policy periods.

WFP also hosted a training on “Shock-Responsive Social Protection (SRSP) in the Caribbean” which started in May 2022 with an e-learning course followed by a face-to-face training in Belize in August 2022. A total of 26 participants from eight government ministries and a local organization attended the face-to-face training. Based on participant’s evaluation of the course, the training deepened their knowledge on SRSP and how existing Government processes and policies need to be strengthened to be more responsive or enabled to mitigate and reduce impacts especially to those most vulnerable.

### **UN SDG DEM JP – Response to the Global Crisis on Food, Fuel and Finance:**

The UN SDG Development Emergency Modality Joint Programme seeks to fill in existing gaps in Belize’s information base and tools to inform the design of appropriate and timely strategies and programs that assist populations affected by the ongoing food, energy, and financing crises and future similar shocks, and policy recommendation and identification of options for financing key interventions. The two main deliverables have been completed by the lead agency, WFP, which are the Final Report on Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Report for Belize, a joint product of WFP, the Government of Belize, and CARICOM, and the final version of the second Report on Market Monitoring System Assessment.

### **CABEI Upgrading and Rehabilitation of the Philip Goldson Highway**

In 2022, CABEI approved a loan to government of US \$24 million for the upgrade and expansion of the Philip Goldson Highway from Mile 8.5 to Mile 24. The loan will finance works related to strengthening and maintaining the integrity of the road network, improving road safety, increasing climate resiliency through improved drainage conditions and facilitating the efficient movement of goods and people along this vital trade corridor.

### **CABEI Corozal Free Zone Access Road**

CABEI has approved a grant of US \$974,037 for the purpose of rehabilitating approximately 1.6 kilometers of the road that enters the Corozal Free Trade Zone to make it more conducive to visitors and their commerce, contributing to the economic growth of this area.

### **CABEI Belize Makers for Education Program**

CABEI has approved a grant of US \$100,000 for this program to be implemented in Belize. The program aims to nurture primary school students in the public-school system in Belize with the knowledge, competencies, and aptitudes to creatively tackle personal and societal issues in the future by providing them with the opportunities to experience Maker Education practices. The advanced technology of the 4th Industrial Revolution allows humans to learn through fun interactions, to stimulate thinking, and to participate in Maker activities through digital tools for creative and meaningful results. Reflecting these changes and demands of the times, countries around the world are actively developing the Maker Movement and fostering makers to create new future jobs based on innovation and creativity.

### **CABEI Bicentennial Scholarship Program**

This program, financed with a grant of US \$125,000, will award to two hundred and fifty (250) scholarships throughout the course of the program, at the rate of fifty (50) new scholarships per annum maximum, with a monetary benefit of US\$500.00 per annum for each student, for a maximum duration of four (4) years of studies per student. The program will complement efforts by the MOECST to provide these necessary resources for students from the most vulnerable communities to complete their secondary education.

### **CABEI Refocusing the Sustainable path for Belize**

In 2022, CABEI informed of the approval of US \$400,000 in grant financing to support initiatives under the National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan. The funding will be used to conduct a study related to the establishment of special tourism development zones in strategic areas of Belize, and also to improve the border processing experience by developing visitor management strategies and plans and integrating new technologies for process controls.



## **Canada-CARICOM Expert Deployment Mechanism (CCEDM)**

On September 8, 2022, MED and the Canadian Executive Service Organization (now named Catalyste+) signed a Memorandum for Understanding to support the implementation of the CCEDM in Belize. The objective of the program is to address priority needs identified by national governments while supporting countries in their efforts to strengthen and diversify local economies, build strong climate-resilient communities, and reduce gender and economic inequalities.

So far, five organizations in Belize have benefitted under the program, and there are currently some other applications in the pipeline. Government and Catalyste+ are conducting a public awareness and stakeholder engagement mission over the period March 7-15, 2022.

## **Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation**

### **MBECA Accomplishments 2022-23**

Over the past year, true to its mission to grow the GDP of our country Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation (MBECA) has successfully developed the country's first ever National Blue Economy Policy and Strategy as well as a 5-year Maritime Economy Plan while introducing and starting to implement Belize's 5 YEAR Strategic Plan for the modernization of Belize's civil aviation.

#### **Key Accomplishments of the Belize Department of Civil Aviation**

Significantly raised the level of effective implementation of aviation security oversight capabilities. This was accomplished through the introduction of new Aviation Security Regulations, an updated National Civil Aviation Security Programme, National Civil Aviation Security Training Programme, and National Civil Aviation Quality Control Programme. There is significantly more oversight which ensures that safeguards against acts of unlawful interference against aviation are deterred.

Carried out inspection of our network of public domestic aerodromes with the intent of identifying possible areas for improving security at these aerodromes and are currently working with the Belize Airport Authority to implement recommendations.

In conjunction with the Belize Airports Authority, embarked on an initiative to implement Performance Based Navigation within Belize's lower airspace. This initiative will ensure proper separation of aircraft in all weather scenarios, increase the efficiency of air navigation, lower carbon emissions from air transport activities, and improved safety.

Trained and certified members of the Belize Defense Force as Air Traffic Controller Officer. This further mitigates any negative impact that may arise from events that would require a contingency response for Air Traffic Control.

Introduced the concept of the Airport City Hub and are currently looking at proposals from parties that are interested in investing in the initiative. Currently there is interest in establishing a training institution, aircraft maintenance facility, and cargo operation.

### **Key Accomplishments of the Belize Airports Authority**

The acquiring and installation of 5 rotating beacons. These increases the safety margins of the aerodromes especially as a navigation aid in times of low visibility and night operations.

Installation of runway lights, repairing of fencing at the Dangriga Aerodrome to increase safety and security margins.

Signing of contracts for rehabilitative works in Caye Caulker and at Sir Barry Bowen Municipal Aerodromes.

Procurement of four sets of PAPI lights to aid in night operations and as navigational aids to increase safety margins.

Belize Airports Authority has increased their presence and services to the 5 most trafficked aerodromes in the country namely:

John Grief Municipal Airstrip  
Sir Barry Bowen Municipal Airstrip  
Caye Caulker Airstrip  
Dangriga Airstrip  
Placencia Airstrip

## **Key accomplishments of the Blue Economy Unit**

(a) MBECA continued work towards establishing a Blue Economy Unit through the establishment of four (4) posts to support implementation of Blue Economy Policy and Strategy along with hiring of a Director of Blue Economy. The 4 post includes:

- Senior Blue Economy Officer
- Monitoring & Evaluation Officer
- Blue Economy Officer – Coastal Development and Environment & Marine Health
- Blue Economy Officer – Sustainable Development, Energy, and Transport

(b) Cabinet adopted the Blue Economy Policy, Strategy and Implementation Plan 2022-2027, and Maritime Economy Plan in August 2022 and both documents were officially launched on 31 October 2022.

(c) MBECA in coordination with Ministry of Economic Development supported by Food and Agriculture Organization held the Blue Economy Climate Resilience Forum & Fair in November 2022. The forum consisted of panel discussions on climate and oceans, inclusion of vulnerable groups, and the marine spatial plan supporting development of the blue economy. A one-day fair was also held promoting entrepreneurs that utilize the blue space.

(d) MBECA in coordination with MED supported by FAO hosted the Women in Fisheries Forum in June 2022, wherein over 60 women within the fisheries sector were provided training in climate change and its impacts on the fisheries sector and their livelihoods.

(e) MBECA launched the Belize Barrier Reef Brand and held the 10,000th birthday of the Belize Barrier Reef. The Belize Barrier Reef Brand is a branding of the Belize Barrier Reef to unify messaging and further promote the conservation and leveraging of the Belize Barrier Reef and Marine Protected Areas.

## **Key accomplishments of the Belize Fisheries Department**

- The fishing industry continues to contribute to the Belizean economy mostly from export earnings and employment. The value of the fishing industry in 2022 was estimated at Bz\$52.3 million, which showed a slight decrease of 3% due to the impacts of Hurricane Lisa on the fisheries sector. The fishing sector provided direct employment to 3,300 license fishers in 2022 and over 250 processing plant workers in the capture fisheries sub-sector.

- The Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation is currently collaborating and developing projects with the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) to assess the presence, abundance and distribution of available fisheries resources in the deep-sea areas within the territorial waters and in the Exclusive Economic Zone.
- The IDB project Blue Loan to the sum of US\$7 million is being developed which is titled: ‘Program for the Promotion of Sustainable growth in the Blue Economy’ and is focused on institutional Strengthening and fishery resource assessments for lobster, conch and finfish within the territorial waters.
- The Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) has also committed in assisting the Government of Belize in conducting fisheries resource assessment within the Exclusive Economic Zone.
- In March 2022, Cabinet endorsed the National Mariculture Policy which in March 2022, Cabinet endorsed the National Mariculture Policy which focuses on the sustainable development of the sector. A consultancy is currently underway to develop comprehensive legislation to provide the enabling legal framework to support all these mariculture initiatives.
- Belize is presently hosting the Pro-Tempore Presidency and the Ministry is the focal point for the SICA/OSPESCA Presidency. During this six month period, the Ministry will continue to ensure that key actions are implemented to ensure the improved regional management of the fisheries resources. Some of the main priorities include addressing IUU trans-boundary fishing, improved management of lobster and conch resources, seeking alternative livelihood opportunities for fisher folks, and developing areas of regional cooperation with the Republic of China (Taiwan).
- Recently, the Fisheries Department received a donation of 61 vessel tracking devices. The vessel monitoring system will be piloted in small-scale fishing vessels in Belize. The use of the satellite equipment will improve the safety of fishers at sea and will support the traceability of the fishery resources.

- Since the signing of the Conservation Funding Agreement referred locally as Blue Loan Agreement (BLA), Belize has achieved three out of eight milestones; these include: Expanding the High Biodiversity Protection Zones (HBPZ or replenishment zones) up to 11.63% of Belize’s oceans; designating all remaining public lands within the BBRRS World Heritage Site as forest reserves (South Water Caye Forest Reserve, Sapodilla Cayes Forest Reserve and Bacalar Chico Forest Reserve); and initiating the marine spatial planning process.
- In late 2022, MBECA and the Fisheries Department have development a comprehensive Co-management Framework for Co-management of Belize’s Marine and Inland Water Reserves and Fishery Areas. This framework provides mechanism for a more comprehensive and coordinated management of these areas. It is expected that in 2023, all co-management entities will be functioning under this new framework.

### **Key accomplishments of the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI)**

- In close collaboration with the Government of Belize (GOB) and The Nature Conservancy, CZMAI was successful in delivering the official launch of Belize’s Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) process on October 19, 2022 in accordance with the requirements of **Milestone 3** under the Belize Blue Loan Agreement (BLA) and Conservation Funding Agreement (CFA). The initiation of the MSP Process also included the:
  - ✓ Designation of CZMAI as GOB’s lead agency for the MSP Process,
  - ✓ Establishment of a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee comprising government, non-government, and private sector representatives to oversee and provide technical guidance to the planning process, as well as to make recommendations to GOB on the Plan itself,
  - ✓ Enhancement of the technical capacity of CZMAI to undertake the process,
  - ✓ Unveiling of the official name and logo for the marine spatial plan selected by the public, i.e. “Belize Sustainable Ocean Plan”
- An interim update to the Belize Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Plan for the period 2020-2025 was successfully concluded in November 2022 with the support of a sub-project entitled, “**Strengthening Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Planning in Belize**” which falls under a larger regional project entitled “**Integrated Ridge to Reef Management of the Mesoamerican Reef Ecoregion (MAR2R)**”. The Belize ICZM Plan serves as the overarching policy framework for coastal management in Belize, and is central to the mandate of CZMAI.

The MAR2R project is an initiative led by the Central American Commission for Development and Environment (CCAD) with funding support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). A more comprehensive update of the Belize ICZM Plan will be conducted as a requirement of **Milestone 5** under the BLA and CLA.

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- CZMAI, in collaboration with the Belize Fisheries Department under the Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation, has prepared the “**Strategy for Reef Resilience in Belize**”, which is slated for endorsement early April 2023. The strategy development process was made possible through the Great Barrier Reef Foundation’s Resilient Reefs Initiative (RRI) which is a global partnership working with World Heritage coral reef sites and the communities that depend on them to adapt to climate change and local threats. The implementation phase of the Strategy will commence immediately following its official launch and will focus on the delivery of three flagship actions together with reef co-managers to build the resilience of coral reefs and the communities that depend on them.
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- In April 2022, Goff’s Caye was closed to visitation in order to commence infrastructure upgrades under a loan agreement for the Climate Vulnerability Reduction Program (CVRP) signed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and by the Government of Belize (GOB) on May 7, 2018. The infrastructural investments are valued at around BZ \$1,261,507 and also serve to promote climate risk reduction and improvement in visitor satisfaction. These include:

11. New dock with low berth/boat slip for small vessels
12. Installation of 7 new mooring buoys
13. Construction of a building to be used as staff quarters
14. New and improved palapa for use by concessionaires and visitors
15. Construction of two separate bathrooms for male and female with two toilet stalls, a shower (for staff and camping visitors only) and a changing room
16. A BBQ hut for grilling on two sides
17. Solar panel system
18. Freshwater catchment
19. Sewage treatment system

- The infrastructure upgrades are currently about 98% completed and is scheduled to be at 100% completed by mid-March 2023. Under the CVRP, a Preliminary Management Plan and a Business Plan (2022-2027) were also developed in October 2022, both of which will help foster long-term sustainability and a first-class visitor experience at Goff’s Caye.
- CZMAI was able to secure a contract with BECOL/Fortis Belize for the provision of environmental services (i. e. water quality monitoring) for another two-year term. This serves

as additional income generation for CZMAI, who has been providing this service to BECOL since 2019.

- Under the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCCP), the United Kingdom (UK) is partnering with countries like Belize to receive marine science technical assistance across three key themes: marine pollution, marine biodiversity, and sustainable seafood. The programme will be delivered with partner countries through three core pathways: science and research, education and outreach, and policy and governance. In January 2023, CZMAI entered into a Contract with the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) under the OCCP for the provision of pilot surveys using Remote Piloted Aircraft (RPA) of beach locations in Belize. This work will serve to pilot an innovative solution for data collection, analysis and reporting on marine litter to reduce costs and increase efficiencies of increased demands to monitor the marine environment.

## **Ministry of National Defence and Border Security**

The Ministry of National Defence and Border Security protects Belize’s land and maritime spaces from threats and provides safety, security, and defence. The aim *“Poise a robust and equipped Defence Forces of Belize to respond to all threats, thus making valuable contribution to national and regional security.”* Within the ministry’s responsibilities are the Belize Defence Force (BDF), Belize Coast Guard (BCG) and the Joint Intelligence Operations Center (JIOC). The ministry has worked diligently in the past year (2022) to transform and enhance the capacity of our organizations including our organizations including major achievements:

- For the Belize Defence Force, renovations at BDF Headquarters (Price Barracks) and Camp Belizario. The construction of the Corozal Drill Hall Facility is underway and the reconstruction of Santa Rosa Conservation Post is scheduled to be completed in FY 2023. The aged equipment and resources of the BDF are also in progress of being modernized and improved through GOB CABEI Initiative. This includes the acquisition of new Hino trucks, support vehicles, updated IT systems. Through cooperation with the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), a new Cessna



Caravan aircraft with radar capabilities was acquired for military and humanitarian operations countrywide.

- For the Belize Coast Guard, progress on the construction of Station Big Creek is at its mid-point and scheduled to be completed by end of FY2023. This station is strategically located to reduce maritime security threats in Southern Belize. Repairs at Hunting Caye and Calabash Caye Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) were also completed.
- For the Joint Intelligence Operations Center, as part of the anti-illicit aircraft deterrence strategy, fifty joint enforcement operations targeting illegal aircrafts were conducted during the period resulting in a 53% decrease in illegal landings countrywide. The JIOC also coordinated major operations during the period to reduce the movement of illicit drugs, weapons, and irregular migrants at illegal border crossings, which allows Customs to increase revenue collection at the various ports of entry. Communications equipment was also installed countrywide to improve operation coverage and response times to illicit aircraft landings.