

Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

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Government of Belize

5th and 6th combined periodic reports

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PREFACE

1. The Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation initiated the process of preparation of the 5th and 6th CEDAW combined periodic reports in June 2011 by establishing a multi sectoral oversight committee. The committee counts on an extensive and representative membership from government and civil society organization, and is mandated to overview the process and ensuring that all stakeholders and parties are duly consulted and their views reported.
2. In order to ensure that the voices of women countrywide were heard, the Ministry planned three regional consultations during the month of July. The consultations had a very high turn out- about 40 stakeholders representatives in each session on average- and stimulated important discussions on what had been achieved and what were the constraints to implement the Committee recommendations in the last 5 years since the last Belize CEDAW report was considered. Further, individual interviews were also conducted at central level. A list of interviewees is annexed to the report.
3. Based on the Committee specific recommendations as stated in CEDAW/C/BLZ/CO/04 the following report has been developed addressing exclusively the actions taken and the results achieved in the specific areas highlighted in the Committee's concluding observations. The report has tried to underlined how Belizean women's lives have changed during the reporting period. Most of the information is supported by data and empirical evidence from national reports, assessments and evaluations, while some is anecdotal and mainly drawn from on focus groups discussions.

INTRODUCTION

4. In 2010 the Statistical Institute of Belize conducted the Population and Housing Census, updating the information that was last gathered in 2000. In April 2011 the main results of the census were presented to the public and have been used in the preparation of this report.

Table 1. Belize Main Indicators

Population	303,422
GDP (current \$US millions)	1,353
GNI per capita (PPP \$US)	5,990
Life expectancy at birth (years)	76
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000)	22.5

Literacy rate, adult total (% of people over 15 years of age)	70
Structure of economy (%): Agriculture	12.2
Industry	22.8
Services	65.1
Unemployment (% of total labour force)	8.2
Unemployment - total	23.1
Private sector merchandise trade (% of GDP)	67.8
Income Gini Coefficient	59.8
Human Development Index (HDI) value	.694
HDI ranking (of 169 countries)	78

Source: UNDP, HDI 2010; World Bank, World Development Indicators (WDI) 2009 and Housing and Population Census, 2010

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5. The total population is 303,422, with an increase of 42% in the last 10 years. Mestizo is still the majority ethnic group with 50% of the total population followed by Creole 21%, Maya 10%, Garifuna 4,6% and Mennonite 3,5%.
1. Roman Catholics remain the single largest religious denomination, but its share of the population fell from 50% to 40%. Pentecostalism is the second largest denomination and increased from 7.4% to 8.5%.
2. The size of the labour force increased by 46% to 131,000. About 30,000 persons were without a job at the time they were interviewed, yielding a national unemployment rate of 23.1% compared to 20.3% in 2000. With a percentage of 33, women recorded twice the unemployment rate of men (16.7%).

Key Development Trends

8. Belize's economy is based primarily on agriculture, agro-industry and services. Forestry, fishing and mining have traditionally been vital sectors, though tourism and construction are assuming a growing importance. Since 2006, the exploitation of newly discovered crude oil fields has also presented additional possibilities, and high oil prices boosted export revenue, making petroleum the single largest export commodity by value. Sugar is the country's main crop; the banana industry remains the country's largest employer; and citrus is rapidly becoming another important agro-industry sector.
1. The country faces numerous challenges to economic growth. Belize's high indebtedness is a continuing trend, with debt service representing close to 10% of exports and the total public-debt

burden remaining at around 80% of GDP at the end of 2010, despite a comprehensive debt restructuring in 2007. In macroeconomic terms, Belize's long term growth performance has been quite good in comparison to the average of Central America and Caribbean countries (IDB 2010), mainly due to tourism and construction sectors which have grown considerably. Nonetheless, this growth has not been felt by the majority of the population, and Belize is not on track to achieve MDG1 as population living below the poverty line has increased to 41.3% (2009) with the target of 16.8% being hard to achieve by 2015. In terms of food security, it is also worrisome to note that the proportion of population with less than minimum dietary consumption is increasing (almost 16% of the population)¹.

2. In terms of human development, Belize is on track to achieve most of the health-related MDGs (although maternal health is not on track) but is unlikely to achieve the education and gender MDGs (e.g. there is no female participation in the House of Representatives and no female minister of government. It is of note that citizen security has been deteriorating despite government's intervention: it is estimated that Belize has had 131 homicides in 2010 (compared to 97 in 2009), which means about 42 murders per 100.000 habitants; Belize has the highest aggression rate of Central America (542) followed by Nicaragua with a aggression rate of 355 (2007 data, regional HDR 2010 on citizen security in Central America); and very low conviction rates, less than 10%. Root causes are both endogenous to Belize (e.g. gangs) but also sub-regional (e.g. drug trafficking).
3. In terms of natural disasters, Belize's vulnerability has been confirmed, with several tropical storms and hurricanes affecting the country. In October 2010, Hurricane Richard, a strong Category 1 Storm, pounded the two main cities, Belmopan (administrative capital) and Belize City (commercial capital), with significant economic losses and environmental impact to forest cover. With 76% of the economy depending on the environment, this vulnerability to natural disaster and climate change more broadly, is very much at the center of the national developmental agenda.

ACTIONS TAKEN AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED ON THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

¹ UNDP Belize Economic Outlook, 2010.

The Committee calls upon the State party to put in place a comprehensive system of data collection in all areas covered by the Convention so as to assess the actual situation of women and to track trends over time. It also calls upon the State party to monitor, through measurable indicators, the impact of measures taken and progress achieved towards the realization of women's de facto equality. It invites the State party, when necessary, to seek international technical assistance for the development of such data collection and analysis efforts. The Committee requests the State party to include in its next report statistical data and analysis, disaggregated by sex, ethnicity and rural and urban areas, in regard to the provisions of the Convention, indicating the impact of measures taken and of results achieved in the practical realization of women's de facto equality.

12. Important efforts have been made in the area of sex disaggregated data collection. The 2010 Population and Housing census has been absorbing much of the Statistical Institute of Belize's time and resources in the last couple of years. Most of the data collected was disaggregated by sex which contributed significantly in providing accurate information for the development of this report.
1. In September 2008 the Ministry of Health inaugurated the Belize Health Information System - BHIS. The BHIS is a fully integrated, comprehensive health information system designed to improve individual health outcomes and public health performance, and optimize resource utilization. It allows for patient-based data to be made available to authorized users anywhere in the country almost as soon as they are entered in the system. It is a very innovative approach that has been exported to neighboring countries. The Ministry is in the process of updating the BHIS with data from the Gender Based Violence Surveillance System. Most of the sex disaggregated data that has been collected and analyzed during the current reporting period has been used to support information provided in this report according to different areas.
2. The Gender Based Violence Surveillance is a component of the National Health Information System (NHIS). The system uses a computerized menu-driven application which registers, stores, processes and produces information on health at the national and local levels. The NHIS is an integrated decentralized information system which operates as a network with external locations coordinated by a central unit. Six District Health Information Units (DHIU) operate as local networks.
3. The module is used by multiple units in and outside of the Ministry of Health, as well as the social sector such as the Police Department, Women's Department, Human Services Department and NGOs like Haven House, one of the two shelters in the country. Participating sectors/units register data on standardized forms and send it to the MOH, District Health Information Unit. District Health Information Units compile data and send information weekly via e-mail or CDs to the Central Unit in Belmopan. The District Health Information Unit also produces standardized reports at the local levels. The system has been widely recognized as very efficient and used as a model in the region.

The Committee also requests that information on the situation of older and disabled women be included in the next report.

16. A situation analysis of older persons in Belize was released in 2010. Among its main findings is that the percentage of older persons in Belize- defined as people aged 60+- has risen from 6.0% to 7.1% with a total number of 23,800. The male to female ratio is 1:00 to 0:92.
1. In terms of financial security, in 2003 the government introduced the Non Contributory Pension (NCP) for Older Persons. This initiative was intended for all women over 65 years in recognition of their contribution to society and implied a benefit of \$75.00 per month administered through Belize Social Security Board (BSSB). However, on actuarial advice this benefit was scaled down and provided only to those considered most in need in the community. In 2008 this benefit was increased to \$100.00 per month and included men aged 67 years and above. A total of 2,790 women benefitted from the project.
2. During the period 2003 – 2010, life expectancy has risen considerably from 66.7 years to 72.5 years for males and from 73.5 years to 77.5 years for females. It is generally considered that one of the main reasons for the increase in longevity of older persons is the improved and increased access to healthcare facilities by older persons. In 2003 the Government of Belize introduced the National Health Insurance (NHI) programme as a pilot project on the south side of Belize City. In 2006 this was extended to the southern Districts of Toledo and Stann Creek. The people in these areas were considered to be poorer in comparison with other districts and therefore in need of improved access to free healthcare facilities as a means of improving their health.
3. The introduction of NHI meant that healthcare services became available to all older persons in these stipulated areas who had previously encountered difficulties obtaining appropriate health care when a financial charge was levied. In 2009, the NHI programme recognized the Mercy Care Centre in Belize City as a new provider of health services specifically to older persons who qualified for this free service. As an NHI service provider the Mercy Care Centre has been able to up-grade its facilities and provide improved medical services to older persons in the locality. During the four years, the average number of deaths in the age group 60-64 years is 48 for males and 33 for females; in the age group 65 and over, the average number of deaths is 314 for males and 276 females. These older women are often faced with loss of financial support, limited employment opportunities and greater dependence on them by family members regarding care giving duties.
4. The Government of Belize ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on May 2011. This is an important step forward as it will bring about important legislative as well as institutional changes.. Even though there is no official data available on people with disabilities, it is estimated that in Belize about 35,000 people are disabled. The Special Envoy for

Women and Children, Mrs. Kim Simplis-Barrow, has invested important efforts in bringing awareness to the situation of people with disabilities in the country since her appointment in 2008. Among her major accomplishments the development of an “ Inspiration Calendar” with drawings done by children with disabilities, the opening of an Intensive Care Unit at the major hospital in the country and the donation of Personal Energy Transportation carts to 20 people with disabilities should be noted.

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The Committee urges the State party to strengthen enforcement of its laws and recommends that the State party elaborate a comprehensive operational plan for the effective implementation of the Convention and of its policies and programmes for the advancement of women.

21. The Government of Belize has made considerable efforts to address all the areas of the Convention through separate policies in different programmes. Eventhough a specific operational plan for the Convention is not in place, all the areas of the Convention are addressed at different levels throughout the comprehensive set of policies and programmes designed to protect and promote women's rights. Following is a review of the updated policies and plans for the reporting period.
22. Following the Committee recommendations, the National Women's Commission, an advisory body to the Government of Belize, initiated a comprehensive revision of the approved 2002 *National Gender Policy*, (NGP) which constitutes the most important framework to promote and protect women's rights in the country. The revision of the National Gender Policy was based on an updated situational analysis of women in Belize as well as other pertinent documents such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcomes Document, the Commonwealth Plan of Action and the CARICOM Regional Plan of Action. The draft of the revised NGP has been submitted to Cabinet for approval.
23. A pro-life non governmental organization known as "Voices for Life" has posed major objection to the introduction of the revised NGP based on the issue of abortion which they are advocating to have re-criminalized in all its forms without exceptions in Belize. The issue held back the policy for over a year and a decision was taken to remove the request for abortion de-criminalization so that the policy could be considered by Cabinet.
24. Among the major commitments of the revised National Gender Policy are:
 - Develop a national strategy for increasing women's political participation at all levels, including their participation as candidates in national and municipal elections and appointment to leadership positions within public and private institutions. This national strategy will consider women's productive and reproductive roles. Special temporary measures are to be implemented to meet specific targets for increased women's political participation on an equal basis with men.
 - Provide adequate human and financial resources for the effective gender responsive implementation of the National Policy on Local Governance. Special focus will be placed on strategies that aim to achieve the goal of greater parity with men in elected and appointed positions.

- Develop and monitor the implementation of a legal framework and support structure that promotes the more equitable sharing of parental duties among women and men as a strategy for enhancing women's participation in political life and leadership positions in private and public institutions.
 - Strengthen national institutions charged with responsibility for the implementation of gender programming so that they can efficiently and effectively coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of this National Gender Policy. This includes the National Women's Commission, the Women's Department and any related Ministry or Department that may be deemed critical to the successful implementation of this Policy.
 - Develop a clear multi-sectoral strategy for implementing gender budgeting within the new public sector three-year budgeting cycle.
25. A very comprehensive *Gender Based Violence Plan of Action* (NGBVAP) was developed for the years 2010-2013. It is inter-sectoral and assigns to each line ministry its own responsibilities, timeline and budget requirements that were agreed to during a consultative process. It makes reference to international commitments made by the government combined with other regional and international instruments, which are being used to mount a national vigorous effort to halt gender-based violence in all its forms in Belize. It is designed to also serve as a basis for advocacy work, and as a tool to assist policy and decision makers to contribute to the achievement of the national and international goals. Belize is signatory to a number of international commitments in regards to the elimination of gender-based violence. This plan has been developed with these commitments in mind. The aim is to ensure that over the next five years, Belize moves towards the goals and objectives of the leading documents in these areas, namely the Millennium Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Outcomes Document, the Commonwealth Plan of Action and the CARICOM Regional Plan of Action.
26. The NGBVAP is a tool whose aim is to outline the problem of gender-based violence, elaborate its linkages to poverty, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and discuss its impact on the nation's development by complementing the policies addressed in key National documents such as: The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents in Belize 2004-2015, Belize's National Gender Policy 2002, the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy and the National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan and Policy. It is widely acknowledged that in order to effectively tackle gender-based violence in Belize, a coordinated and cross-sectional integrated approach is required to address the cultural, social and economic obstacles to achieving lives free from violence. This National Plan looks to create a fully comprehensive strategy, encompassing law enforcement, health, justice administration, housing, community advocacy and education.

Please refer to the sections on health and Sexual Reproductive Health for relevant policies and programmes in those areas.

The Committee encourages the State party to eliminate impediments women may face in gaining access to justice and to enhance women's legal literacy, awareness of their rights and capacity to effectively claim them.

27. Efforts to increase women's access to justice were invested at all levels. The number of female judges has increased. There are currently two women High Court or Supreme Court judges out of the seven judges in total.
28. In the area of legal information, the Women's Department has produced various materials, including a handbook outlining women's rights under the law in 2008. The handbook is user friendly and provides guidance for Belizean women on basic information about their legal rights as it pertains to a number of issues including, among others: domestic violence, divorce, child custody, labour rights, sexual harassment and maintenance rights. The Belize National Gender Policy recognizes the need for access to legal representation, and raises the possibility of a national legal insurance scheme.
29. As part of the activities for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence 2009, the Women's Department scheduled a free Legal Clinic in Belize City on family and gender-based violence issues including divorce, property rights, legal separation, child maintenance, domestic violence and sexual harassment. With the support of several local attorneys, the Women's Department was able to offer those in need of legal advice, free access to this service. A total of eleven attorneys willingly participated in this clinic and encouraged the Women's Department to hold the clinic more frequently.
30. In response to this suggestion, as a part of activities for Women's Month in March 2010, the Women's Department organized a Legal Clinic on Family Issues and Gender-based Violence in the southernmost district town of the country which is considered the poorest district and which is home to the indigenous group, the Maya. Two local attorneys, namely a Former Minister of Human Development with responsibility for Women's Affairs and a Human Rights activist who at the time was the attorney for the Maya Leaders Alliance with a pending Supreme Case on Maya Customary Land Tenure Rights, offered their services at this clinic. The response to the clinic was overwhelming and saw women from urban and rural communities visiting the clinic for legal guidance on various issues.

The Committee calls on the State party to intensify its efforts to raise awareness about the Convention and about laws, policies and programmes that are designed to enhance women's enjoyment of their rights.

31. During the CEDAW regional consultations a thorough presentation of the convention was given to all participants, including an explanation of the optional protocol. The two main policy documents that were presented above were heavily based on CEDAW and made reference to the Convention throughout their length. Further efforts need to be invested in systematic dissemination of the Convention and its articles at all levels of society.
32. In Belize, International Women's Day was traditionally observed as Women's Week and encompassed several days of activities around March 8. These activities were generally organized by government and civil society organizations and coordinated by the Women's Department. In 2009, the Department realized that the growing awareness and involvement of various agencies including private sector in activities commemorating International Women's Day had outgrown a week of observance. In recognition of this and of the fact that the highlighting of the achievements of women in Belize warranted more than seven days of activities, the Women's Department nationally designated the month of March as Women's Month. Besides the month of September which is designated as Celebrations Month in Belize to observe our country's national holidays such as Independence Day and St. George's Day, March has now become the most recognized month of observation in Belize. Over the past two years, Women's Month has seen a dramatic increase in interest by the business community which has used the month as a time to honour women as consumers. As such businesses have developed television commercials recognizing Women's Month and offering special discounts to women during the month of March. The popularity and success of Women's Month is now used as a powerful advocacy tool to place the women's agenda at the forefront.
33. There are two main events during the year that are specifically aimed at raising awareness on Women's Rights: the 16 days campaign of activism on GBV and the Women's Month. These are the times when the Women's Department coordinates nationwide campaigns. In 2009 and 2010 the number of activities planned for International Women's Day called for a month long celebration. While in 2009 the theme was "Creating opportunities for development through women's economic empowerment" in 2010 the campaign focused on male involvement under the theme "Valuing ourselves: Promoting Shared Responsibilities." The activities normally include a Women's Summit, with panelists that stimulate discussions on issues pertinent to the theme, the Annual Outstanding Women's Award- in 2011 the 5th prize was awarded. In addition, a diverse range of activities were organized at district level by the Women Development Officers.
34. Over the past 5 years, the Department has produced several educational materials focusing on women's empowerment and women's rights, based on the international convention the country had ratified, CEDAW and Beijing, as well as Belem do Para, namely: Women's Rights Handbook, HIV Peer Counseling for Women and Girls Manual and a Training Guide on Facilitating Information

Sessions on the Link between HIV and Violence Against Women. The Department continues to reproduce and disseminate its existing material in particular: Women's Handbook on Domestic Violence, Men's Handbook on Domestic Violence and Domestic Violence and its Effects on Children, some of which have been translated into Spanish. The handbooks explain the cycle of violence and its consequences and provide some guidance on how to deal with the major problems. The department was also responsible for the development of the Entrepreneurship Manual for Women, which was complemented by countrywide training for women's groups in both urban and rural communities. The trainings educated women on what owning a small business entails, the positive and negative aspects of having a small business, how to think of small business ideas, and how to get a good start when embarking on a small business venture.

35. In the last 5 years, under its "economic empowerment" programme the department has trained over 2,000 women on skills ranging from cake decorating to information technology, from sewing to basic accounting and management.
36. In an effort to emphasize that women's rights are human rights, the Women's Department has, through internal and external funds, executed public education campaigns focusing on Women's Rights. The production of the Women's Rights Handbook was coupled with radio, newspaper and television advertisements as well as brochures and posters about property rights, child custody, child maintenance, sharing parental responsibility and sexual harassment, among others.

The Committee calls on the State party to give priority to the strengthening of the national machinery for the advancement of women and to provide it with the authority, decision-making power and human and financial resources necessary to work effectively for the promotion of women's equality, coordinate the use of the gender mainstreaming strategy across all sectors of Government and ensure that such efforts are results-oriented and sustainable in the long term.

37. The Women's Department continues to be one of the leading organizations in Belize dedicated to improving the lives of women. The Women's Department has worked to empower women through a wide range of progressive initiatives including training classes for women, the promotion of public education in gender equity and equality in the schools, facilitating support groups for women in all districts and organizing community events to raise awareness about Domestic Violence and women's issues. The Women's' Department has offices in each of the six districts of the country.
38. There has been a considerable growing recognition of the central role of the department in promoting and protecting women's rights. This has happened through an incremental increase in budget allocation from government: from 360,000 BZD (180,000 USD) in 2007/2008 to 485,000 BZD (242,500 USD) for 2011/2012. Following the Committee concerns and considering the need to have

special focus on rural women, a Rural Women's Development Officer was appointed in 2010. The newly appointed officer is in charge of, among other responsibilities, strengthening the capacity of women's group in rural areas through the implementation of a diverse range of capacity building programmes as well as supporting groups in their networking efforts to escalate the impact of their work.

39. The authoritative role of the Department was recognized in its renewed responsibility as chair of the National Gender Based Violence National Committee, which entails an overall coordination and monitoring role over the implementation of the Gender Based Violence National Plan. (please refer to GBV section.)
40. The important role of the National Women's Commission has also been acknowledged through the establishment of two full time paid positions for the first time: one of the executive secretary and the one of a program officer mainly in charge of developing indicators relevant to monitoring the situation of women in Belize. This last position is linked to a project. Established in 1982, The National Women's Commission of Belize (NWC) serves as an advisory body to the Government on issues relating to women. Its establishment was a part of an overall effort of the Government to meet a series of international commitments, commencing in 1975 when Belize participated in the First World Conference on Women. Specifically, the National Women's Commission has the mandate to:
 - Serve as a strategic advisory body to the minister with responsibility for women and gender issues and to advocate for the fulfillment of the standards, principles and goals embodied within the Convention (CEDAW), the National Gender Policy and other relevant policies.
 - Serve as national advocate on issues related to the upgrading of the situation of women and girls and to advocate on matters regarding compliance with, or implementation of, the Convention, the National Gender Policy and other relevant policies as they relate to government ministries, institutions and entities, etc.;
 - Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the provisions of the Convention and ensure national submission of the Belize progress report to the UN Committee every four years.
 - Promote public awareness and encourage effective and efficient planning and coordination efforts among relevant stakeholders on matters relating to gender equality, equity and women's empowerment.
 - Ensure that the appropriate implementation agencies undertake specific initiatives and tasks related to the implementation of the Convention, the National Gender Policy and other relevant policies.
 - Recommend, through the minister, improvements in and development of national policies and legislation within the framework of the Convention, the National Gender Policy and other relevant policies.

41. The current National Women's Commission was constituted in December 2008 and is composed of 9 women and 2 men. The Commission is presently in the process of drafting the instrument that will legally establish it as a Statutory Body.
42. In 2006, the Women's Department identified Gender Focal Points in key government agencies. Gender Focal Points are persons who have been designated within a specific government ministry, non-governmental organization, community-based organization, school or business to monitor and stimulate greater consideration of gender equality issues in daily operation of their institutions. They formed the Gender Focal Points Committee responsible for the implementation of the Gender Integration Action Plan.
43. In 2007, a Gender Focal Points Handbook was developed to guide Gender Focal Points working in partnership with the Women's Department of Belize's Gender Integration Programme. The Handbook was intended to provide advice, inspiration and guidance as well as provide ideas and suggestions that can help enhance the impact of Gender Focal Points work within the different Ministries, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, schools and businesses. While the Gender Focal Points were instrumental in developing a Gender Integration Action Plan, the group had been somewhat dormant over the past few years as a result of staff turn-over and failure to identify persons with actual decision-making capacities as Gender Focal Point. Through UNFPA, the Women's Department has secured funding to revitalize the Gender Focal Points Committee, identify new focal points who must have decision making capacities and revising the Gender Focal Points Handbook. In January 2011 the system of Gender Focal Points was re-established and received substantial training. Their ToR were substantially revised and guidelines for appointment were distributed to all CEO in relevant ministries. Although it is too early to evaluate its impact, it is clear that most of the members have higher decision making power within their institutions and have been given greater space to promote mainstreaming of gender issues within their ministries.

The Committee recommends that the national machinery for the advancement of women be strengthened at district levels by forming multidisciplinary teams for implementation of the Convention, including in the area of violence against women. The Committee further recommends that the State party put in place effective mechanisms and systems to monitor implementation of the Convention and evaluate the impact of its laws, policies and programmes in terms of achieving the goal of gender equality, within clear timetables.

44. The Women's Department continues to play a crucial as chair of the GBV committee, and most of its resources at district level are invested in assisting victims of domestic violence. In 2010 1,416

individuals (1131 women and 285 men)² received support on an array of issues including domestic violence, sexual assault, legal separation, child maintenance and child custody.

45. The National Gender-Based Violence Committee is a multi-sector group committed to ensuring an integrated, multi-faceted response to all forms of gender-based violence in Belize by addressing law enforcement, health, judicial education, and community advocacy. This multi-sectoral response gives specific attention to protection, provision of services, justice and prevention. This Committee is chaired by the Women's Department in the Ministry of Human Development & Social Transformation and was formed in 2004. The Members of the National Gender-based Violence Committee include representatives from Magistrate Court, Family Court, Police Department, Community Rehabilitation Department, Ministry of Health and several civil society agencies including the Shelter for Battered Women.
46. The National Committee convenes in the main city; however, each district in the country also has local gender-based violence committees, or multidisciplinary teams, which reflect the composition from central level and are coordinated by the WDOs at district level.

The Committee urges the State party to make the promotion of gender equality an explicit component of all its national development strategies, policies and programmes, in particular those aimed at poverty alleviation and sustainable development. The Committee also invites the State party to place emphasis on the promotion and protection of women's human rights in all development cooperation programmes with international organizations and bilateral donors so as to address the socio-economic causes of discrimination against women. The Committee recommends that the State party put in place evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of its poverty reduction strategies on women, including those in the rural areas, and provide information in its next report. It calls on the State party to pay special attention, and provide targeted support, to women heads of household in all its poverty-eradication efforts, including in the rural areas and among Mayan women.

47. During the 2010 Census about 30 thousand persons were without a job at the time they were interviewed, yielding a national unemployment rate of 23.1% compared to 20.3% in 2000. About two-thirds of the persons 14 years and over were either working or looking for a job. This is 3 percentage points higher than in 2000. Women recorded twice the unemployment rate of men (16.7%). In Toledo and the northern districts, it was as much three times. Cayo (26.2%) and Corozal (24.5%) experienced the highest rates of unemployment. Persons who have completed university enjoyed a much lower unemployment rate (6.3%).

² Please refer to the GBV section for overall data on violence.

48. Males generally earned more than females. In 2010, their average (median) monthly income was \$922 compared to \$882 for females. These figures are approximately 35% higher than in 2000. The public sector continued to account for about 15% of the employed population. Foreign Born Persons showed a lower unemployment rate (17.7%) than the national average (males 11.0% and females 29.0%)³.
49. The National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan (NPESAP) represents the measures to be undertaken toward eliminating poverty during the 2009 to 2013 period. It builds on the findings of various consultations and studies undertaken during the period 2005 to 2007, on the strategies and policies endorsed through the results of the 2008 general elections, and on stakeholder consultations undertaken during its preparation in early 2009. The NPESAP sets out issues and measures in the macro-structural, human development and infrastructure areas, and simultaneously targets urban and rural poverty and the cross cutting issues of governance, gender and environment. The structure of the monitoring and evaluation framework designed to support effective implementation of the NPESAP reinforces another important cross-cutting issue, that of participation.
50. A study commissioned by the NHDAC for the NPESAP 2006-10 suggested that economic disparity, coupled with women's lack of political power, adversely affects their ability to access good health care and renders poor women more vulnerable to domestic violence, abuse, and HIV/AIDS. In low income households, advancement is much less apparent and additional burdens are borne by women as a result of traditional domestic roles and responsibility for dependents.
51. The National Gender Policy comprehensively elaborates the gender situation in Belize and proposes priorities for reform and greater gender equity. The five areas of greatest concern for improvement are identified as: health and access to health care; wealth and employment generation; the reduction of abuse and violence (especially against women and children); education and skills training; and greater participation in power and decision-making. Targeted advances in each of these spheres are critical to poverty reduction among poor households.
52. The Ministry of Economic Development, Commerce and Industry and Consumer Protection has clearly indicated in its Medium Term Development Strategy that "development processes should be designed to build on and compensate for the strengths and weaknesses of gender roles."
53. The Belize Rural Development Programme (BRDP) was implemented from 2006-2010 with an overall budget of over eight million Euros. The overall objective of BRDP was to support sustainable economic growth as the primary means of alleviating poverty in the rural areas of the country. The expected results of BRDP, per the revised log frame, were:
 - Development of efficient small, medium and micro enterprises at community/village level; the target is to support the creation of 1,000 – 1,500 productive rural enterprises.

³ Main Findings of the House and Population Census 2010.

Development of rural infrastructure for basic services; the target is that 115,000 rural people should have access to the 100-200 new infrastructures supported by BRDP.

Strengthened policies, institutions and communities; the target is that 10% of rural families in the country should benefit from BRDP, and at least 30% of the beneficiaries should be women and youth

54. The basic strategy of BRDP followed a participatory, bottom-up and decentralized approach, by supporting the communities (or villages) and districts in defining their development priorities and identifying specific projects and enterprises for support from BRDP. The total number of households who have benefited directly from BRDP subprojects is 3,290 in all districts of Belize. Approximately 67.9% of these households are female headed. In total 67.9% of beneficiaries were women or youth, which went well beyond expectations.

Please refer to section on access to credit for more information on BRDP.

The Committee urges the State party to effectively use temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 25, in order to accelerate the realization of women's de facto equality with men in all areas. The Committee draws the State party's attention to the fact that a purely formal or programmatic approach is not sufficient to achieve women's de facto equality with men, and that the application of temporary special measures is part of a necessary strategy towards the accelerated achievement of substantive equality for women in all areas covered by the Convention. The Committee encourages the State party to establish a legislative basis for the use of temporary special measures, either in the Constitution or in other appropriate legislation. It urges the State party to establish concrete goals, such as quotas and timetables, to accelerate achievement of substantive equality between women and men for each area of the Convention.

55. The Belize scenario demonstrates the need for employing special temporary measures to increase women's political participation in Belize. Since 1984 only 14 women have offered themselves as candidates in national general elections. Of these women, 4 have won seats in the National Assembly. Of those who won, only 2 were appointed as Cabinet Ministers with full ministerial powers. In 1998 an additional woman was appointed Minister of State and had limited access to Cabinet proceedings. Of those who won in national general elections, all were relegated to social sector Ministries, mainly the Ministry of Human Development. In one other case, a woman who was defeated in the national election, was appointed Special Envoy for Gender and HIV (2003) and was named Senator (2005).

56. According to a leading women's political advocate, "Belizean women fare better when they stand for Municipal and City Council elections largely because the political system is based on proportional representation (a slate) as opposed to the First Past the Post System where one candidate is measured against the other as in national elections⁴." However, only two of nine municipal bodies are headed by women. In 2009, a woman was re-elected to serve her second term as Mayor of Belize City. In that same year a woman was elected to serve her third term as Mayor of San Pedro, which is the most important tourist town in the country.
57. The 2010 census brought two important issues into the discussion of women in decision making: the majority of households admitted that the political position they would like to see women occupying were those of Prime Minister - 31,875 households and Government Minister- 21,959 households. When asked what kind of and support would be more appropriate for women, most of the respondent indicated training and education followed by family support and political party support.
58. A Study⁵ on opportunities for women's political participation concluded that women's reproductive role within the family and society, lack of support from political parties and gender socialization patterns create barriers for political participation. The Study also revealed that women tended to be active in party politics and in leadership positions within their communities at either young ages (before having children) or in their late forties and fifties (when their children are grown). Overall, during their lifetime, women were most active in faith-based institutions across the country. The consideration of special temporary measures for advancing women's political participation was proposed.
59. A Political Reform Commission was established in 1999. It spent one year reviewing all aspects of Belize's governance system and made 103 recommendations for political reform. Included in their review was the recommendation to implement special temporary measures to increase women's political participation. The Commission could not reach a consensus on this issue and it was therefore not recommended. The Report states, "The majority of the Commission does not recommend that a quota system for the appointment of women to public bodies be enacted for Belize."
60. However, the Women's Agenda of the People's United Party (PUP) 2003-2008, still advocated for at least 30% of public office positions to be held by women. As a result, women were appointed to senior public offices. This includes appointments as Senators, CEOs of Government Ministries and Executive Directors of Quasi Government Bodies. This trend has continued across government administrations.

⁴ Interviews with NWC members, June 2011.

⁵ Rosberg and Catzim (1999). Opportunities for Women's Political Leadership in Belize.

61. Currently, out of the 13 seats in the Senate, four are held by women, including the position of President. The Executive Directors of the Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the Social Security Board (SSB) and the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) are all women. The President of the National Institute for Culture and History is also a woman. There are six women CEOs out of nineteen. They come from the of Ministries of Human Development and Social Transformation, Economic Development, Natural Resources and the Environment, Public Services and Labour, Finance and Broadcasting and Information and Public Utilities. The Director of the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) is a woman. While this situation shows an increase in women's access to leadership positions, political power, which is concentrated in the hands of the Cabinet, remains male dominated.
62. In 2000 and 2006 the National Women's Commission implemented a few bi-partisan political training sessions for women. More recently, the National Women's Commission launched a full-fledged Women In Politics Project, a capacity building program for women aspirants to political office. The Women in Politics Project is an initiative of the National Women's Commission through UNIFEM. The first cycle of the project commenced in October 2009 and targeted women particularly young and indigenous women who were either already involved in politics at the local and national level or who had aspiration of a political career.
63. The objectives of the project were: Participants would familiarize themselves with the findings of the "Women in Politics publication" and be able to articulate some of today's challenges regarding women's leadership e.g. political, community etc; they would receive training, education and awareness to address the inequalities between men and women in political leadership and decision-making in Belize; they would have a working knowledge of gender and gender roles and they would participate in training programmes for women in both theory and practical. The training sessions included Parliamentary Procedures, How to run a campaign, Campaign financing, Politics & the Media, How to craft your political message, Gender awareness. The training would also include practical session in Introduction to Computers, Interviews, Sessions with women politicians and Observing Conventions & Campaigns. Cycle 1 of the Women in Politics Project concluded with commencement exercises for 52 women on March 25 as a part of activities for Women's Month in Belize. Although, the first cycle of the project had intended to include a bi-partisan brainstorming session with the leaders of the two main political parties to examine the findings and the advocating for formal adoption of proposed strategies and monitor the implementation of selected strategies , these components have not been realized but related activities will commence shortly.
64. In June 2010, seven women from Belize were successful in being selected to be a part of the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership " Advancing Transformational Leadership for Gender Justice in the Caribbean training programme. They participated in a 15-day course which consisted

of five (5) days 'virtual' training followed by 10 days residential training during the month of July. Leading lecturers, and experts from Government, civil society and the United Nations, were scheduled to facilitate the highly interactive and participatory training. Two of the seven women selected had previously completed the Women in Politics Project.

65. Organizations like the Toledo Mayan Women Council (TMWC) have also taken on the challenge of increasing women's political participation. The TMWC is conducting training sessions for indigenous Mayan women who aspire to become village council leaders or village alcaldes. A positive outcome of the project is visible as two women were appointed in the positions of Alcalde (responsible to maintain law and order in the community- a very well respected and important position until recently occupied only by men) in Toledo district.
66. At the level of local government, women have had greater success in offering themselves as candidates and in winning municipal and Village Council Elections. The Mayor of Belize's most populated commercial centre is the first woman ever elected. A recently approved National Policy on Local Government makes provision for continuing support for gender equity at the level of local government⁶.
67. The overall presence of Belizean women at the national decision-making level is low. It is notable that Belize has not shown significant progress in this area; in fact, some regression is evident. In 1993, 3.45% of the seats in the Lower House of the Belize Parliament were held by women. Whilst this improved to 6.9% in 1998, there has been persistent regression since. As of 2003, only one seat was held by a woman and by 2008 there were none. At the sub-national level the situation is somewhat better, yet similar. About 32 per cent of elected village council members and two out of nine Mayors are women. Per the constitution, mayoral candidates are voted for separately from candidates or councilors so that these two positions reflect poll results and not appointments.

⁶ Situational Analysis of Women in Belize, 2010.

The Committee urges the State party to place high priority on implementing a comprehensive approach to addressing all forms of violence against women, including through the effective enforcement and monitoring of the Domestic Violence Act. It also urges the State party to raise public awareness, through media and educational programmes, that all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and marital rape, are unacceptable and prohibited by law. The Committee calls upon the State party to provide training on the new Act to the judiciary, law enforcement officials, legal professionals, social workers and health providers and to fully sensitize them to all forms of violence against women so as to ensure that the perpetrators of violence are effectively prosecuted and punished with the required seriousness and speed. The Committee further recommends that the State party seek to increase the number of female judges and law enforcement officials as a means to encourage women to report cases of violence. It calls on the State party to establish support measures for victims of domestic violence, including increasing the number of shelters and legal, medical and psychological support. The Committee encourages the State party to make full use of the Committee's general recommendation 19 in its efforts to address violence against women. The Committee urges the State party to establish a centralized system to gather data on the prevalence and incidence of violence against women and to include such data, as well as information about the impact of measures taken, in its next periodic report.

Studies/Research/Policy Framework

68. Acknowledging the growing relevance of cases of domestic and gender based violence in Belize, the government commissioned a National Gender-based Violence Plan of Action (2007-2009) that was developed to guide work in this area. Although the plan had limitations, the recognition of the need for more coordinated efforts was significant in the development of a more effective approach. In 2009, the Women's Department, with the support of UNIFEM, undertook a project to strengthen the response to gender-based violence. Among the activities included in the project were the assessment of the current situation as well as the development of a new Plan of Action for the next four-year period.
69. The National Assessment of Actions on Ending Violence Against Women, sets out the Belize framework for actions on violence against women, including international commitments, national policies and plans, and laws and legislative reform. It reviews the situation of violence against women in Belize, including the response of both public sector systems and civil society organizations. The Assessment also gives a set of guiding principles for work in this area, and sets forth recommendations in the areas of Understanding Violence and Raising Awareness, Legislation, Confidentiality, Coordination of Systems Response, The Police, The Courts, The Health Care System, Social Services and Counseling, the Education System, The Women's Department, Working

with Men, Civil Society and Ending Violence Against Women. At the same time as the National Assessment was being carried out, a second study looked specifically at policing and prosecution of sexual offenses. This report included fourteen additional recommendations to improve the response of the justice system to sexual assault and sexual abuse and to improve coordination among the various sectors in this regard. These two documents provide a framework for the development of the new National Gender Based Violence Plan of Action (2010 – 2013). The guiding principles of the plan and its definitions are based on the CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action and the Declaration of Belem do Para.

70. The Goals and Objectives for the National Plan of Action speak about zero-tolerance for gender-based violence in Belize by improving police response, access to justice and strengthening prosecution. It also aims to give adequate support to survivors through the establishment of an a comprehensive structure, including shelters. The plan also aims at raising awareness at country level on gender based violence through intense advocacy and communication strategies. It is important to note that the plan gives priority to male involvement both at the level of reintegration of perpetrators as well as targets of prevention campaigns.
71. The National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (2002) includes commitments to amend, enact and strictly enforce legislation and take preventive measures to protect children, women, youth and elderly from all forms of violence and sexual abuse, including rape. It also includes commitments to develop safe, age-appropriate and confidential programmes for medical, social, psychological rehabilitation and support for girls and boys who are subjected to violence and sexual abuse, including rape. This Policy sets forth broad outlines for action, without specifying specific actions or objectives. Although it commits the government to provide resources for the implementation of the policy, no specific resources are attached to the implementation of its commitments, including those above.
72. The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (NPACA 2004 – 2015).
The NPACA was a significant step forward in the development of national plans in Belize, as it included specific outcomes and targets. In addition, it was signed by both the then-Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, to promote ownership of the document as a truly national plan. The National Plan of Action includes in its overall principles due care for, and attention to, the principles of gender equality.

The Plan sets targets and outlines strategies to address family violence and child abuse which will undoubtedly have a positive effect on both girls and boys. However, it does not address the particular vulnerability of girl children to sexual abuse, both within and outside the home.

73. Policies and Legislation - GBV

Over the last few years, particular pieces of legislation were amended or passed in seeking women's empowerment. These initiatives include the amendment of the Criminal Code to provide for the offence of marital rape, to rationalize the penalties for the offence of carnal knowledge of a female child, provide for a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment for habitual sex offenders and make provisions for the treatment and reporting of sex offenders.

74. Furthermore, the law now recognizes common law unions as couples living together for five years or more and not married to anyone else for the purpose of inheritance and property rights. The law has also placed economic value on home care/child care in instances of divorce or separation and custody of children no longer depends on mother's private life.

75. **Legislative Framework**

The new Domestic Violence Act was passed in 2007 and came into force in 2008, replacing the 1992 Domestic Violence Act. The new law provides for sanctions against physical, emotional or psychological, sexual and financial abuse. In Belize City, it comes under the jurisdiction of the Family Court. In the districts where there are no family courts, it comes under the jurisdiction of the district Magistrate's Court.

76. The new Act strengthened the courts' ability to provide protection for women being abused by intimate partners. One of the significant changes included in the legislation is the broadening of the definition of "spouse" to include not only individuals who are living together but unmarried, but also those who have children in common or who are in visiting relationships (de facto spouse).
77. The Act allows for a number of orders designed to provide protection from domestic violence, including abuse by intimate partners:
- A Protection Order which prohibits the respondent from abusing the applicant, from being on premises named in the order (such as a residence, place of employment or school), from communicating with the applicant, from taking or damaging property belonging to the applicant, from approaching the applicant within a specified distance, or from encouraging another person to engage in any of this conduct.
 - An Occupation Order which grants the applicant the right to live in the household residence.
 - A Tenancy Order which grants the applicant the right to live in rented household premises, and directs the respondent to continue to paying the rent on those premises during the period of the order.

78. The Act is stated in gender-neutral terms – that is, it provides equal protection for both women and men who are victims of domestic abuse. However, in this report, attention is focused on the implications for women who are abused by intimate partners. One remaining limitation of the definitions of “spouse” and “de facto spouse” is they must be a person of the opposite sex, leaving women and men in same-sex couples outside the protection of the law. In addition to issuing these Orders, the court may also order an abuser to return property, pay financial compensation, pay child maintenance (until a permanent arrangement can be put into place), seek therapy or counseling, and turn any weapons used in the commission of domestic violence in to the police.
79. When an application is made for a Protection Order, the Court may make an Interim Order until the hearing takes place. Interim Orders may be granted whether or not the abuser is present or has been given notice of the proceedings. When an Interim Order is made, the court will summon the respondent to appear at a further hearing as soon as possible.
80. The Act also provides for stiff penalties for breach of court orders in domestic violence cases. These include:
- For a first conviction, a fine up to \$9,000, or imprisonment up to one year, or both
 - For a second conviction, a fine of between \$12,000 and \$15,000, or imprisonment of up to 24 months, or both.
 - For any subsequent conviction, imprisonment of five years.
81. For first-time offenders, the Act allows for a Rehabilitation Order in place of punishment. Such orders require the offender to undergo probation in a rehabilitation programme and to engage in community service work for one year. Although the new Domestic Violence Act addresses many of the deficiencies and flaws of the previous Act, there continue to be concerns about its implementation. The Chief Magistrate⁷ has said that the legislation is powerful, but the lack of legal services for women undermines their ability to use the legislation to its full potential.
82. One particular weakness of the new law is the absence of consequences for police officers who fail to fulfill their responsibilities under the Act. The Act states that “every police officer shall respond to every complaint or report alleging domestic violence whether or not the person making the complaint or the report is the victim.” However, there are no sanctions for police officers who do not respond. Given that lack of police response is an ongoing concern in domestic violence cases, this is a problem.
83. The Domestic Violence Act is a civil remedy, with the criminal process only coming into play if an abuser breaches an order of the court. Criminal Code provisions on assault, harm and other violent offences can also be used in cases of domestic violence. These charges are currently heard in Magistrate’s Court (or in the Supreme Court, depending on the severity of the offense).

⁷ Interviews held in the Women’s Department in June 2011

Data

84. In terms of data gathering, the Ministry of Health has established a very comprehensive surveillance system that is being coordinated by the Epidemiological Unit at the Ministry.
85. The Gender Based Violence Surveillance is a component of the National Health Information System (NHIS). The system uses a computerized menu-driven application which registers, stores, processes and produces information on health at the national and local levels. The NHIS is an integrated decentralized information system which operates as a network with external locations coordinated by a central unit. Six District Health Information Units (DHIU) operate as local networks. The module is used by multiple units in/outside MOH, as well as the social sector such as the Police, Women's Department, Human Services and NGOs like Belize Family Life Association. Participating sectors/units register data on standardized forms and send it to the MOH, District Health Information Unit. District Health Information Unit compiles data and send information weekly via e-mail or CDs to the Central Unit in Belmopan. DHIU also produces standardized reports at local levels

Year	Male	Female	Total
2008	315	1351	1669
2009	254	1107	1365
2010	238	1227	1477

Epidemiology Unit, MoH, 2011.

86. In 2007, 1,148 cases of domestic violence were reported. Women aged 30-39 years and 20-29 accounted for the highest number of cases (31.3% and 31.1% of total cases respectively), followed by the age groups 40-49 years (22.3%) and 15-19 years (6.5%). Between 2001 and 2007, the rate of domestic violence reporting increased. The highest rate was reported in 2003 (45.3 cases per 10,000). Although the median rate for that period was 33.2 cases per 10,000 population, the rates increased by 37.8% from 2001 (26.74 / 10,000) to 2007 (36.85 / 10,000)⁸. The Situational Analysis of Women in Belize 2010 found that reported cases of domestic violence over a six-year period ranged from 1,240 cases in 2003 to 1,669 cases in 2008. A majority of victims of domestic violence are in the 20 to 49 age range. They are mostly women and are either in married or in common-law unions, followed by single women, women who are separated and women in visiting relationships.

⁸ Health System Profile Belize, PAHO, 2009

87. Although a majority of the cases were reported by women, there was a visible increase in the percentage of cases reported by men. This increased from 11% and 12% in 2004 and 2005 to 18% of cases in 2008. Both women and men reported psychological violence and physical violence. Mostly women reported sexual violence although at least one case of sexual violence was reported by men on an annual basis. A large number of cases were categorized as “other”, most likely due to the incomplete forms.
88. A majority of reported cases were repeated incidents rather than new incidents of domestic violence. A majority of domestic violence cases were reported in the Belize and Corozal Districts, followed by the Orange Walk and Cayo Districts. The Stann Creek and Toledo Districts have the lowest reported cases of domestic violence. Twice the number of domestic violence cases were reported in urban than in rural areas. The centralization of the response to domestic violence may be responsible for this urban majority.
89. Persons of all educational levels reported domestic violence although a majority of the reports were of women who had completed a primary education, followed by secondary education. The Creole and Mestizo ethnic groups which comprised a majority of Belize’s population also had the highest reported cases of domestic violence.
90. Across the country, the reported aggressors were mostly common-law spouses, followed by spouses and ex-spouses. The aggressors tended to fall within the same age group as victims (20 to 49 years) although in some cases older men in the 50 to 59 age range and those in the 15 to 19 age range were also reported aggressors.
91. There was no consistency in the domestic violence referral system. In 2004 80% of cases were referred by or to the Family Court or Magistrate Court. In 2008, this changed to 2.2% of cases. In 2004, 10% of cases did not indicate their point of referral. This increased to 20% of cases in 2005. Since 2007, the majority of cases were referred to or by the Police Department followed by the Women’s Department.
92. In 2008, 531 applications were made to the Family Court for Protection Orders (444 females, 87 males). A total of 387 protection orders were granted. This portion of the data is not disaggregated by sex. The jurisdiction of the Family Court is Belize District. In the other five districts of the country, all family matters are heard before the Magistrate’s Court. A total of 875 applications for protection orders were made at the Magistrate Court of which 669 were granted. This data is not disaggregated by sex⁹.
93. Women are most affected with a Female: Male ratio of 4.3:1. Intimate partner is most common aggressor (common law 491 cases; married 372 cases; and single with 296 cases / year 2009). Cases reported from urban settings were 2.7 times more than from rural areas. Creoles 641 and Mestizo 483 (82% of the total cases).

⁹ MESECVI-CE report 2008.

94. Many domestic violence cases still go unreported. A focus group session with Mayan women in the Toledo District, for example, revealed that the main problem they face daily is domestic violence. Almost all of these women experienced domestic violence in their homes and knew of other women in their communities who also lived in situations of domestic violence. They reported that in some cases when the spouses are not around, their boy child takes on the role of perpetrator. Yet, most of these cases were not reported or lodged in the domestic violence registry for that district. Among this group of women, domestic violence was linked to alcohol consumption and to patriarchal notions of women and children as men's property.
95. In terms of Sexual abuse, in 2008, 38 cases of rape and 98 cases of carnal knowledge (carnal knowledge and unlawful carnal knowledge) were lodged at police departments countrywide. In 2009, the police department reports a decrease in new rape and carnal knowledge cases to 30 and 62 cases respectively.
96. However, in 2009, the Magistrate Courts reported that 112 cases of carnal knowledge, 29 cases of unlawful carnal knowledge, 38 rape cases, 31 cases of indecent assault, 9 cases of incest, 31 cases of indecent assault, 7 cases of attempted rape and 7 cases of unnatural crime were lodged across the country. This totalled 224 cases resulting from gender-based violence and comprised approximately 4% of all crimes lodged at the Magistrate Courts in 2009. Murders resulting from domestic violence are recorded under the murder category without reference to the element of domestic violence.
97. Sexual offence cases are lodged at the Magistrate Court for a preliminary inquiry before proceeding to trial in the Supreme Court. If a case takes an unreasonable amount of time to come up for review, the case is "struck out" by the magistrate in order to preserve the defendant's right to the timely administration of justice. Incomplete investigations, weak evidence and a lack of human resources contribute to long delays in preparing a sexual offence case for the preliminary inquiry. Many cases are therefore dropped before they are heard in the Supreme Court. Even when cases ascend to the Supreme Court, there is a low rate of convictions as most cases are dropped either before the trial begins or while the trial is in progress.
98. It should be noted that PAHO supported a major assessment/review of the surveillance system in August 2011 with the technical support of CDC which is supposed to produce concrete recommendations for the overall improvement of the system as well as for the development of a comprehensive data collection and case management protocol.
99. **GBV and HIV**
A study on domestic violence and HIV¹⁰ revealed that:

- Almost half of the women living with HIV reported physical violence by an intimate partner.

¹⁰ *HIV and Violence against Women in Belize Report*, Belize, PAHO/WHO, 2010

- Almost four in every ten ever-pregnant women suffered physical violence by a partner.
- Three in every 10 reported sexual violence and 5.7 in every 10 women living with HIV ever married/partnered had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.

100. The study further revealed that violence against women constitutes a barrier to access to services. For example, 2.2 out of 10 HIV positive women and 3.3 out of 10 of women living in domestic violence reported that they have to ask their partner's permission before seeking health services. Another, 6.6 out of 10 women living in domestic violence and 3.5 out of 10 women with HIV had experienced physical and/or sexual abuse and were injured as a result of the violence.

101. **Systems Response**

There are three primary institutions responsible in this area: The Women's Department in the Ministry of Human Development; Family Violence Unit- Police Department and The Family Court. The MoH conducts regular training for their nurses in the health centre throughout the country to address and identify cases of gender based or domestic violence. They are responsible to fill in the form and refer the survivor to a WDO.

102. The Women's Department is normally the first contact for a survivor seeking support. The WDOs in each district are trained to assist the survivors with the first basic counseling and they register the client as well as take basic information that may be useful should they decide to take the case to court. They are normally informed about their rights and refer for further support according to the case.

103. The Belize Family Court keeps pace with the ever-growing social and legal needs of the family. It plays a vital role in keeping society together. It is responsible for the administration of justices for family and juvenile justice matters. The Family Court has dealt with thousands of cases over the years ranging from domestic violence, legal separation, custody, maintenance and juvenile offenders.

The Domestic /Family Violence Unit of the Police Department deals with, among other things, domestic violence issues and breach of protection orders. The Police Department has also developed a Domestic Violence Protocol. The issue of Domestic Violence is included in the curriculum at the Police Training Academy and the WD conduct training sessions annually.

104. The Belize Legal Aid Center offers legal support at a significantly reduced cost.

Both the Domestic Violence Unit of the Police Department and one of the shelters for battered women have emergency hotlines. The number for the Police hotline is toll free but the number for the shelter is not. Translators for court proceedings are at the request of the magistrate. Women's access to shelters for battered women is done voluntarily.

105. The Police

Sensitization on gender-based violence has been mainstreamed into the training curriculum for new police officers and a domestic violence unit has been established within the police department. Only two shelters for battered women serve women and children across the country.

106. Domestic violence cases in Belize are assigned to a Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) in each station. However, only Belize City has a fully functioning DVU. In other stations, individual officers – usually only one per station – are assigned to handle domestic violence cases. The police officer assigned receives a 6 days training . Unfortunately the high personnel turn over has a direct impact in the efforts aimed at building capacities and establishing trust and confidence.

107. Ombudsperson

One mechanism that has not been efficiently used to promote police accountability on violence against women is the Office of the Ombudsperson. After the position was vacant for almost a year, the government appointed a new Ombudsperson, in January, 2009. The Ombudsperson has the authority to investigate corruption or wrongdoing by any public authority, as well as any injustice, injury or abuse resulting from the action of a public authority. Police inaction or corrupt practices in instances of violence against women fall within this jurisdiction. In 2010 the Ombudsperson addressed 183 formal cases, which required investigation and court proceedings and 158 informal cases. Most women requesting the support of the Ombudsperson are mothers trying to get their children out of jail¹¹. Resources of the office are very limited, with only one Legal Officer supporting the work of the Ombudsperson.

108. The Courts

The new Domestic Violence Act considerably strengthens the courts' ability to protect women.

109. The establishment of Family Courts in each district continues to be an ongoing need. Currently, family court matters are dealt with in the districts by Magistrate's Court, usually at one session per week. These courts are generally overburdened by the number of cases and women's complaints must wait until the day designated for family court matters. However, there are notable exceptions to this rule, as in the case of Corozal where these cases are dealt on ad hoc manner and hence addressed in the same day.

110. Young women and girls, and all children who are abused, need particular protection in the court process. In 2002, a policy was made to allow sexually abused children to testify behind screens which would protect them from visual contact with their abusers. This policy, however, has not been

¹¹ From individual interview with Ombudsperson Mrs Cynthia Pitts, June 2011.

implemented, apparently because resources have not been provided to acquire the necessary screens.

111. The Women's Department

Since the early 1990s, the Women's Department has been at the forefront of work on violence against women in Belize. The Department works on GBV issues at every level: providing immediate support to victims of domestic violence; doing public education; training police and other systems to improve their response; developing policy and legislation; and working to mainstream a more effective response to violence against women at all levels.

112. The Department operates with a small staff, including one Women's Development Officer in each district. Addressing the issue of Domestic Violence takes the greatest part of the human resources available, especially in providing information, support and advocacy for individual women who suffer from domestic violence, including court advocacy and accompaniment.

113. Another responsibility of the Department is chairing the National Committee on Gender- Based Violence. The National Gender-Based Violence Committee is a multi-sector group committed to ensuring an integrated, multi-faceted response to all forms of gender-based violence in Belize by addressing law enforcement, health, judicial education, and community advocacy. This multi-sectoral response gives specific attention to protection, provision of services, justice and prevention. This Committee is chaired by the Women's Department in the Ministry of Human Development & Social Transformation and was formed in 2004. The Members of the National Gender-based Violence Committee include representatives from Magistrate Court, Family Court, Police Department, Community Rehabilitation Department, Ministry of Health and several civil society agencies including the Shelter for Battered Women.

114. The National Committee convenes in the main city; however, each district in the country also has local gender-based violence committees.

115. In the area of legal information, the Women's Department has produced various materials, including a handbook outlining women's rights under the law in 2008. The handbook is user friendly and provides guidance provide Belizean women with basic information about their legal rights as it pertains to a number of issues including, among others: domestic violence, divorce, child custody, labour rights, sexual harassment and maintenance rights. The Belize National Gender Policy recognizes the need for access to legal representation, and raises the possibility of a national legal insurance scheme.

116. Major achievements noted by the Women's Department included the development of procedures for receiving, handing and pursuing complaints, although the impact of these procedures has not been

adequately assessed. The Women's Department reported an increase in community awareness of the Domestic Violence Act and services but stated the need for more awareness, especially in rural communities.

117. The Women's Department recognizes that the approach to respond and prevent violence against women must be a holistic one. Consequently, through the United Nations Development Fund for Women, now UN Women, the Women's Department has introduced a Batterers Intervention Programme to Belize. This Programme is a sixteen (16) week violence prevention, psycho-educational programme for men who are abusive to women. The programme is court-connected and receives its referrals from both the criminal and civil jurisdiction of the court. The Programme model is based on a psycho-educational approach which accepts that violence is a choice and that abusive behaviours are used to maintain control. It has nine (9) goals: To help participants stop violence in their lives; To help participants understand that violence is a choice; To help participants accept responsibility for their behavior and to choose new behaviours that are free of violence; To help participants understand the cost of violence to themselves, their partners, their children, and society in general; To teach participants skills for addressing conflict and responding to stress; To establish and model an atmosphere of respect within the group and to challenge disrespectful behavior; To empower participants to take steps towards improving their lives and their relationships; To encourage participants' examination of where their violent behavior began; and To create a network of men who will advocate for non-violent relationships.
118. In April 2010, cycle 1 of the program, titled Partners in Peace (PIPE) commenced. The first cycle of the rehabilitation program, started with eight men who were referred to the program by both the Family and Magistrates Courts. One man was expelled from the program due to non-compliance with program rules. The first cycle of the program was completed on August 7, 2010. The second cycle is expected to start by the end of 2011.

The Committee calls upon the State party to ensure that legislation on trafficking is fully enforced. It recommends that the State party address the root cause of trafficking and exploitation of

First Request for Support: How it works

When a client comes in, there is a brief intake where the name of the person is recorded. The Women Development Officer (WDO) requests a brief description of the situation or what services are being requested by the client. It is at this point that the WDO will verify if there is a need to fill in the GBV Surveillance form. Once this has been identified, the WDO explains that the form is used to gather data but that their names are not made public and that they can also use to proof that they requested some sort of assistance with their DV situation. Most clients don't have any problem and information is recorded throughout the session with the client. The way the forms are used doesn't intimidate clients because the information it is not a question/answer session, but rather a conversation with the client. Once the session is over, the client is given the original copy and one is placed in a file for the Department's records. The third copy is stored temporarily until it is sent to District Information Unit at the end of the month or within the first days of the following month.

Women's Department, 2011

prostitution by increasing its efforts to improve the economic situation of women, thereby eliminating their vulnerability to exploitation and traffickers, and take measures for the rehabilitation and social integration of women and girls who are victims of trafficking and exploitation of prostitution. It recommends that the State party further strengthen bilateral, subregional and multilateral cooperation to combat trafficking. The Committee

recommends that the State party closely monitor the impact of increased tourism on prostitution and enhance related prevention measures.

119. Over the years, the Government of Belize has made strides to implement its 2006-2010 National Strategy for Human Trafficking, drafted in an effort to provide an opportunity to maximize utilization of existing resources. In particular, steady progress has been made towards the goals of the National Strategy in the areas of public education, intergovernmental cooperation and coordination, and training. This strategy has been extended and will be revised to reflect the needs beyond 2011.

120. The Government of Belize demonstrated considerable efforts to apply law enforcement measures against trafficking offenders during the reporting period. Belize's government prohibits all forms of trafficking through its Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Act of 2003, which prescribes punishment between one and five years' imprisonment and a \$5,000 fine.
121. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Committee (ATIP) an inter-governmental committee chaired by the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, is the lead in all efforts to combat sex and labor trafficking. Agencies which are part of the Committee include: the Ministry of Human Development (Department of Human Services), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Attorney General's Ministry, Immigration Department, Police Department, Labour Department, Customs Department, Department of Public Prosecutions, the National Committee for Families and Children, Belize Tourism Board, the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and Youth Enhancement Services. The Anti Trafficking in Persons Committee is mandated to coordinate and monitor Government's anti trafficking efforts. The Committee reports periodically to Cabinet.
122. Through monitoring by the Committee lessons learnt from operations and cases are identified and incorporated into the subsequent revisions of the Standard Operating Procedures. In 2011 efforts are being made to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation component of the Committee through coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Statistical Institute of Belize to ensure that periodic and accurate reporting mechanism are in place to continuously compile and monitor activities and efforts.
123. The ATIP Committee continues to lead the efforts against trafficking in Belize. During this reporting period they have finalized the Standard Operating Procedures for the Committee. The Information - Education and Communication (IEC) Sub-Committee continues to work to ensure that the prevention component of Anti-Trafficking Issues is being addressed. They also are responsible for organization of trainings. The Operations Sub-Committee provides support in the planning of surveillances and operations conducted. The committee has remained committed to meeting and sharing ideas to ensure that the needs of the victims are met and that strategies in place to address trafficking issues are adequate and implemented with a victim-centered and human rights-based focus.
124. Statistics on human trafficking are recorded and stored by the Joint Intelligence Coordinating Centre (JICC). Additionally, periodic reports are compiled by the inter-governmental Anti Trafficking in Persons (ATIP) Committee. The cases that have been identified during the reporting period have all been cases of forced prostitution. There has been an increase of cases during this period that show

- a vulnerability of young women trafficked in for forced prostitution. Both immigrants and Belizean nationals have been victim to trafficking. The arrests made for trafficking violations were all women¹².
125. In 2010 the report indicated that: "There was no data to support the premise that Belize is a country of origin, transit and/or destination for men, women or children subjected to conditions of commercial sexual exploitation, forced or bonded labor, or other slave-like conditions. The few cases of trafficking which have been identified thus far indicate that persons have been trafficked for mainly labour purposes."
 126. The Major Crimes Unit from the Belize Police Department has participated in three (3) major operations from April 2010 to March 2011. The Major Crimes Unit also participated in three (3) major surveillances.
 127. In 2010 the Major Crimes Unit personnel conducted a total of forty eight (48) interviews with suspected victims of Trafficking in Persons. As a result of these interviews conducted with suspected victims of Trafficking In Person countrywide by Major Crimes Unit personnel, seven persons have been arrested and charged for 8 counts of Trafficking in Persons, Attempted Trafficking in Persons and Rape and Aggravated Assault which resulted from Trafficking in Person investigations. Additionally there have also been five (5) reported CSEC Cases. These cases are currently before the court.
 128. Child sex tourism has been identified as an emerging issue. The Government remains vigilant and is taking a proactive and preventative approach in conjunction with NGO partners. Child sex laws in Belize do not have extraterritorial coverage; these laws are presently being reviewed with a view to reform.
 129. The government remained vigilant in 2010 and 2011 in its efforts to ensure that human trafficking is prevented and combated in Belize. Limitations include a lack of resources, particularly, human resources available for the prosecution of cases. The Government of Belize also lacks the resources to provide long-term assistance to victims to facilitate their transition into the workforce, school system, and housing.
 130. Prevention
The ATIP maintains sustained ongoing, national, multilingual, (English, Spanish, Hindi, and Mandarin), multimedia public information and education campaign on human trafficking. The campaign was national in scope and targeted the entire population. The objectives of the campaigns are to: raise awareness on the issue of human trafficking; educate the public about human trafficking; provide information on how victim services could be accessed discourage human trafficking. Components of the campaign also target potential victims by highlighting signs of human trafficking and indicating where assistance could be sought. Under the patronage of Mrs. Kim Simplis-Barrow, Special Envoy for Women and Children, the first National Symposium on the

¹² ATIP report 2010.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) was held in Belize under the theme “Preserving Innocence and Dignity” on August 25th and 26th, 2010 .

131. As part of the public awareness campaign, the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) during the period February-November 2010 continued the schools outreach program including the CSEC component. The University of Belize and Galen University were only two of a number of schools targeted during this period. In addition, the BTB partnered with the Youth Enhancement Services (YES) for a community sensitization session in San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye.
132. Partner NGOS such as the Child Development Foundation (CDF) and Youth Enhancement Services (YES) have conducted community workshops and sensitization session on human trafficking , CSEC and related issues.
133. Tracking and monitoring is conducted on a regular basis by the Department of Immigration as mandated by the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act. The Department of Immigration and Nationality monitors the movements of people within and without our borders for evidence of trafficking and screens for potential trafficking of victims.
134. The Belize Police Department through its intelligence gathering unit, Special Branch, maintains a permanent presence at the Belize Western Border Station, and at the Phillip Goldson International Airport as well as in every district. A police officer works within the Immigration and Nationality Department at the Belize Northern Border station to assist in the monitoring of immigration and emigration patterns and the screening for potential victims of trafficking.
135. The Belize Tourism Board (BTB), a member agency of the Anti Trafficking in Persons Committee, has instituted the internationally accepted ECPAT¹³ Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct is aimed at businesses in the tourism sector to educate them about child sex tourism and to enlist their assistance to combat this scourge.
136. The Government has also supported the NGO, YES, a member of the ATIPS Committee in its programme “Intergenerational Transactional Sex” to provide assistance to child victims.

137. Protection and Assistance to Victims

Under Part III of the Law, the Government is required in the investigation of trafficking cases to (a) take all necessary steps to identify victims of trafficking (b) provide reasonable protection to such victims to prevent their recapture, and (c) take reasonable measures to secure the victim’s family against threats of intimidation by the traffickers.

138. In practice, the Ministry of Human Development, through its Department of Human Services (“the Department”), provides, shelter and basic needs to victims of trafficking while they are in Belize for the duration of the criminal proceedings. The basic needs of victims are assessed and addressed by the

¹³ End Child Prostitution and Trafficking

Department on a case-by-case basis. Government has also had to provide 24 hour security protection to victims when necessary. Belize has two shelters for victims of trafficking in persons, one each in the Cayo and Belize Districts. Victims also have access to free medical services and to counseling services.

139. The Government of Belize does assist foreign trafficking victims by providing temporary to permanent residency status. Under the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act, victims who have obtained temporary residency in Belize receive special consideration in applications for permanent residency. The Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation assists and supports victims in becoming economically independent. The Department of Immigration assists such victims in obtaining residence in Belize, where appropriate. There were a total of 7 trafficking victims identified during this reporting period. All victims were assisted by the Government.
140. The Anti Trafficking in Persons Committee has recently revised its Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) which provides guidelines for the handling of trafficking in person's cases from operation and intelligence gathering to identification of trafficking victims to the investigation of and preparation of cases. The Committee also conducts training to reinforce the use of the SOP.
141. Victims are never arrested or detained. All potential victims of trafficking are offered protective care. The types of protective care vary. Young children are placed in children institutions. Teenagers and young adults are placed in foster homes or in boarding homes. Adults accompanied by their children are placed in safe homes (shelters). All victim care facilities are administered by the Government of Belize.

The Committee recommends that the State party implement measures to ensure equal rights of girls and young women to all levels of education, to retain girls in school and to put in place monitoring mechanisms to track girls' access to and achievement levels in education. The Committee recommends that the State party put in place measures, including monitoring mechanisms and sanctions, to ensure that pregnant students stay in school during pregnancy and return after childbirth. The Committee calls on the State party to formulate the necessary legislative and policy measures to ensure de facto adherence to article 10 of the Convention throughout the entire educational system. It also encourages the State party to actively promote the diversification of educational and professional choices for women and men and offer incentives for young women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields of study.

142. Belize has made tremendous gains in the area of reducing the gap between boys and girls enrollment and retention rates. The ratio of girls to boys in primary education shows that the proportion of girls

relative to boys has increased. This reflects a positive achievement for girls. In 1995, the ratio of girls to boys in primary education was 0.939. By 2002, the ratio was up to 0.97 and at year end in 2009 it has been reported at 1.01¹⁴.

143. The fact that girls are now outnumbering boys in primary school suggests two things. First, the focus on girls has been successful and must be maintained. Second, there is now a need to focus on educational policies and strategies that would help reach full parity with boys and girls at the primary school level. However, one in every twenty boys and one in every twenty girls do not attend primary school. Beyond the issue of parity there is also need to focus on the overall participation of children of high school age who are not attending school. In 2006, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reported that 58.7% of children who are of secondary school age are attending secondary school and of the remaining 41.3%, approximately 14.9% are in primary school. The remaining 26.4% are out of school.
144. In agricultural communities, the labour of boys is considered more valuable than that of girls and, while boys are likely to drop out of school to work on farms, girls are more likely to complete their schooling. It can be further noted that many in the Belize education system are critical of the suitability of the teaching methodologies and curricula as a means to address the current lack of parity in education.
145. In the case of secondary education the target of parity of attendance rates between girls and boys was also achieved and surpassed. The ratio of girls to boys was 1.105 in 1995, reached 1.087 in 2002, and has now risen to 1.13 in 2009. Thus, Belize has been exceedingly successful in bringing girls fully into secondary education. It is notable, however, that the small gender gap previously evident in primary school has widened considerably at the secondary school level. This widening gap indicates a need to sustain and improve upon the gains made for girls, while introducing efforts to ensure that boys are not left behind.
146. The same pattern of imbalance is repeated in tertiary education. Belize has done well to encourage girls to take up available tertiary places as the basis for ensuring improved capacity to win opportunities for entrepreneurship, income and consumption, but the country has faced challenges in achieving and sustaining parity between boys and girls. The relative enrollment rate of eligible girls to boys increased dramatically from 1.488 in 2002 to 1.73 in 2009).
147. The education system continues to function under a state-church management which implies that churches continue to exercise their influence in matters related to students and teachers' pregnancies. Although there is no data to support the facts, anecdotal evidence shows that there were several cases of pregnant students dropping out of secondary schools or request not to attend graduation day because of their pregnancy. During consultations with the Belize Council of Churches it was clarified that even though most schools deliberately regulate these matters, there have also been instances in

¹⁴ MDGs score card and outlook.

which parents have spontaneously removed their pregnant daughters from schools or where other parents of school mates of a pregnant student have requested that the school to intervene.

148. In the case of teachers, the 2004 landmark case of the Toledo teacher Maria Roches that sued and won the case against the Catholic Church for firing her over her pregnancy out of wedlock has established an important precedent. It should be noted, however, that the law is clear in terms of unfair dismissal as it relates to pregnancy.
149. In terms of unfair dismissal, the Amended Labour Act -13th April, 2011- provides for continuity to employment; *“to protect workers against unfair dismissal; to establish procedures for termination of contract in a fair and equitable manner; to establish a Labour Complaints Tribunal to hear and determine complaints from workers; to provide for greater benefits to workers, including better provisions in respect of severance pay; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. Section 42: Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law or agreement, the following reasons do not constitute good and sufficient cause for dismissal or for the imposition of disciplinary action against a worker; subsection 1 g) a female worker’s pregnancy or a reason connected with her pregnancy, or absence from work during maternity leave; h) that was subjected to sexual harassment at the workplace or by the employer or another worker of the same employer; HIV status; An employee’s continuous employment shall not be treated as interrupted if the employee is absent from work due to a.) annual leave, maternity leave, sick leave or any other leave in accordance with the provision of any law, contract or agreement.”*
150. Adolescents (and some teachers) in Belize who get pregnant while enrolled in school often do not have the option to continue school if they carry their pregnancies to term. According to the National Gender Policy, individual schools continue to exercise their own discretion in the expulsion or coerced withdrawal of pregnant students from school, including when the student is of compulsory education age. The same policy states that this penalisation of pregnant students “is considered highly discriminatory, regardless of whether the school is government-managed, government-assisted or independent of government support. This is an issue of the nationally-enforced “right of a person, regardless of sex, to an education, as well as of the limits on institutional incursions into personal matters.” Please refer to the section on HFLE for more information regarding sex education.

The Committee urges the State party to fully implement article 11 of the Convention. It encourages the State party to implement measures to encourage and support women’s entrepreneurship, including by raising awareness and providing access to credit.

151. The major programme that provided credit to rural areas was the one supported by the EU started in 2006 called Belize Rural Development Programme (BRDP), with a total budget of € 8.675 million, of which the EU committed up to € 7.0 million, the GoB up to € 0.8 million, and rural communities up to € 0.875 million.
152. The overall objective of BRDP was to support sustainable economic growth as the primary means of alleviating poverty in the rural areas of the country. The expected results of BRDP, included the following objective which provides an indicator for women involvement as beneficiaries of this project: Strengthened policies, institutions and communities; the target is that 10% of rural families in the country should benefit from BRDP, and at least 30% of the beneficiaries should be women and youth. Under the large grants and work contracts the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) received Grant # 5: Women and Youth: for € 299,999
153. After 4 years of implementation, BRDP and its partners made investments through micro grants, small grants and large grants. The Project Management Unit with the DDCs and credit unions, Belize Enterprise for Sustained Technology (BEST), Citrus Growers Association (CGA) and YWCA implemented 681 micro grants with poor rural families, 73% of them were with women and youth and involving 2,411 final beneficiaries, thus impacting the lives of 3,092 poor people.
154. The BRDP Report states that a deliberate effort was made to identify and support especially underprivileged groups and individuals like single women, unemployed youth, handicapped groups, etc. The report continues by stating that BRDP has exceeded the achievement of Result 1 (establishment of between 1,000 to 1,500 farm and non-farm enterprises) and Result 3 (10% of rural families in the country should benefit from BRDP, and at least 30% of the beneficiaries should be women and youth).
155. BRDP invested in 42 small group projects across six districts of the country. It is important to note that approximately 45% of these projects dealt with agriculture, and involved 54 villages and affected the lives of 549 families in rural communities. Approximately 50% of all group members are women.
156. Some of the basic principles applied were as follow: that a micro-grant is one-off (one-time investment) and provides a foundation for developing or expanding self-employment activities, and that potential recipients come from the villages that had been prioritized because of their remoteness and lower level of development. The micro-grants are targeted to female-headed households (e.g. widows, abandoned women).
157. The micro grant program was completed with 79 grantees being provided with the necessary investments. The program was successful for the most part with only a small number having problems with implementation of their businesses. Continuing monitoring for these grantees will be handed over to the partners in the District which consists of CGA, Women's Department, Agriculture Department, and the Cooperatives Department.

158. Gender Dimensions of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy:

Gender dimensions of the 2002 poverty assessment provide mixed indicators of the impact of gender roles on the economic lives of individual and families. The National Gender Policy (2002) noted that despite educational advances, equal economic opportunity continues to elude women, as disparities persist in the areas of employment, recruitment, salary, promotion, benefits, and access to credit.

159. Whilst the labour force participation rates for men consistently exceeded 75% over the 2003-2007 period, the comparable rate for women did not surpass 45% for the same period. Moreover, the unemployment rate amongst women in the same time-frame fell no lower than 13%, whilst that for males was recorded as low as 5.8%.

160. A study commissioned by the National Human Development Advisory Committee for the National Poverty Elimination Strategy and Action Plan (NPESAP) 2006-2010 suggested that economic disparity, coupled with women's lack of political power, adversely affects their ability to access good health care and renders poor women more vulnerable to domestic violence, abuse, and HIV/AIDS. In low income households, advancement is much less apparent and additional burdens are borne by women as a result of traditional domestic roles and responsibility for dependents.

161. This NPESAP represents the measures to be undertaken toward eliminating poverty during the 2009 to 2013 period. It builds on the findings of various consultations and studies undertaken during the period 2005 to 2007, on the strategies and policies endorsed through the results of the 2008 general elections, and on stakeholder consultations undertaken during its preparation in early 2009.

162. The NPESAP sets out issues and measures in the macro-structural, human development and infrastructure areas, and simultaneously targets urban and rural poverty and the cross cutting issues of governance, gender and environment. The structure of the monitoring and evaluation framework designed to support effective implementation of the NPESAP reinforces another important cross-cutting issue, that of participation.

163. In the articulation of the strategies and activities for the achievement of the NPESAP account was taken of a number of ongoing poverty assessment and national planning activities. These included a country poverty assessment exercise that will update poverty estimates for Belize and an MDG needs assessment and costing prognosis exercise that will generate, inter-alia, a scorecard of progress in MDG achievement and an assessment of measures and related cost for achievement. It is anticipated that the outputs of these initiatives will further inform and update the poverty elimination strategy herein and serve to refine the integrated action plan.

The Committee recommends that efforts be strengthened to eliminate occupational segregation, both horizontal and vertical, and to adopt measures to narrow and close the wage gap between

women and men by applying job-evaluation schemes in the public sector connected with a wage increase in female-dominated sectors. The Committee urges the State party to take further appropriate measures to introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits for all women, in line with article 11, paragraph 2 (b), of the Convention. It encourages the State party to ensure full compliance with its labour laws, including by the private sector. It also urges the State party to implement its laws on sexual harassment, raise awareness for women and men workers and ensure that women take advantage of the laws' protective provisions. The Committee invites the State party to monitor the impact of measures taken and trends over time.

164. A Statutory Instrument 112 of 2005 increased the entitlement to maternity leave for public officers from 12 weeks to 14 weeks on full pay. The officer can take up to 7 weeks leave before and 7 weeks after, but cannot take any less than two weeks before and 7 weeks after.

165. In 2008, the Women's Department commenced a review of the Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act of 1996. This review continued in 2009 and the focus of the consultative review was the practicality and operationalization of the piece of legislation. The initial review (2008) revealed that the Act is largely seen as ineffective. The Women's Department consulted with the Police, Judges, Magistrates, women's organizations and the University of Belize to find out the reason for these views. The outcome revealed in the 2009 consultation was: Fear of dismissal without compensation was deterring complaints; and a public awareness campaign was needed.

166. The consultative review revealed that the ideal solution would be to strengthen the Act and to execute a campaign to publicize it, however, it is recognized that this would take a long time to achieve. The attorney heading the review suggested that the Minister of Human Development pass regulations under the Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act and the Labour Minister passes regulations under the Labour Act to obligate employers to inform the public that sexual harassment is illegal and in particular:

- To display a prescribed poster prominently in the workplace.
- To ensure their workplace is free from sexual harassment.
- To give each employee a prescribed statement against sexual harassment.
- To set up a complaints procedure, in instances where the employer has more than 5 employees.

167. In terms of regulations, he suggested that provisions be put in place where in any breach of the regulations will be subject to a fine of not more than \$50,000.00. The annual return made by each employer should include a statement that the employer has complied with these regulations. The

Labour Officers' powers under the Labour Act should be extended to enforce compliance with the new regulations.

168. A Consultative Review was conducted to identify challenges to the enforcement of the Protection Against Sexual Harass Act 1996. Since the introduction of the Act no cases have been reported. The Consultative Review consisted of interviews with key stakeholders including: Community Rehabilitation Department, the Magistry, WIN-Belize, Community Policing, University of Belize, Family Court. Among the main issues arising, it was clear that employees are make complaints but are not making them formal and taking the matter further. If formal complaints not being made then nothing official can be done. The review revealed that according to the Labour Department unfair dismissal laws have been prepared and their passage into law is anticipated. The Labour Commissioner was consulted throughout this process and he is reviewing the proposals to determine the most practical way forward for the drafting of amendments and/or regulations needed to strengthen the enforcement of sexual harassment as an offence.
169. The legislation stipulated that in case of sexual harassment in the workplace, it should result in dismissal or transfer. However, no complaints have been brought before the Magistrates Court under this legislation., which underlines the need to implement campaigns and sensitization sessions to raise awareness on the existing legislation, such as the ones conducted by the Women's Department.
170. Quasi-Civil Act. Under the law, the court can order the payment of compensation. If compensation is not paid the person is guilty of a criminal offence. Also a criminal offence of victimisation under the Act, greater awareness of this might increase reporting.
171. At the University of Belize the student handbook given to students contains the University policy on sexual harassment and sets out what is inappropriate within the institution. The University recognizes its duties under section 7 and 8 of the Protection Against Sexual Harassment Act 1996.
172. The Labour Department's traditional function is to enforce Labour laws in Belize. The main legislation being the Labour Act (Chapter 297). This is a general Labour law which deals with terms and conditions of employment, basic facilities for workers, wages, overtime, health and safety, holidays, retirement, termination and dismissal. In terms of unfair dismissal, the Amended Labour Act -13th April, 2011- provides for continuity to employment; *"to protect workers against unfair dismissal; to establish procedures for termination of contract in a fair and equitable manner; to establish a Labour Complaints Tribunal to hear and determine complaints from workers; to provide for greater benefits to workers, including better provisions in respect of severance pay; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. Section 42: Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other law or agreement, the following reasons do not constitute good and sufficient cause for dismissal or for the imposition of disciplinary action against a worker; subsection 1 g) a female worker's pregnancy or a reason connected with her pregnancy, or absence from work during maternity leave; h) that was subjected to sexual harassment at the workplace or by the employer or*

another worker of the same employer; HIV status; An employee's continuous employment shall not be treated as interrupted if the employee is absent from work due to a.) annual leave, maternity leave, sick leave or any other leave in accordance with the provision of any law, contract or agreement."

The Committee urges the State party to take concrete measures to enhance women's access to health care, in particular to sexual and reproductive health services, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 24, on women and health, and to ensure a reduction in the maternal mortality rate.

173. Within the Ministry of Health, the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programme was mandated to support women and children, established with the purpose of facilitating a health care environment where there is an improved access, coverage and quality of basic care for mothers and children. Services provided to women are: pre and postnatal integrated health care for women: this includes the monitoring and management of normal pregnancy, gynecological and obstetric pathologies, and sexual and reproductive health services, based on specific reproductive health needs of individuals and the community.

174. The services are delivered through a network of eight urban and thirty-seven rural health centers that are staffed by Public Health Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, Rural Health Nurses and Domestic Auxiliaries. Community Nursing Aides and Traditional Birth Attendants form an important link between the programme and the community.

175. The Health Strategic Plan 2009-2011 had the following objectives:

- Safe motherhood initiative strengthened towards having a healthy mother and a healthy newborn by providing quality comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health services to non-pregnant females > 10 years of age; by providing quality health care services for the prevention and control of cervical cancer and quality health care services – (prevention, detection, management and referral services) to female and male survivors of gender based violence; by providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services with a human rights-based approach (gender, culture, race, religion, sexual orientation among others) throughout the life cycle. Also the strategy plans to provide comprehensive care for women during pregnancy to prevent, control, manage and refer patients with obstetric complications. Overall the initiative aims to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of interventions towards improving maternal and child health through the Safe Motherhood and Child Health Committees.

- The Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI) strengthened with emphasis on the areas of nutrition and immune preventable diseases by providing holistic care to all children utilizing the IMCI tools for management and follow-up.

176. The strategy also aims to develop and implement nutrition surveillance system for early detection of maternal and child malnutrition. Define pocket of susceptible and apply cost-effective interventions to reduce its prevalence

- Comprehensive prevention of vertical transmission of HIV and syphilis provided to pregnant women and their exposed infants by providing comprehensive services to pregnant women for early identification of HIV and syphilis infections and exposed infants to reduce the transmission rate of HIV and syphilis (screening, care and treatment, follow up and referral)
- Data management of MCH services improved by training staff on the use of the Belize Health Information System (BHIS), providing resources and enforcing its use in the delivery of health services.

177. In December 2009 a “Companion at birth” policy was approved with the main objective of providing expectant mothers an opportunity for family involvement (doula, or midwife, where this is not possible) during labor and delivery admission and to facilitate improved mental health/psychological health during labor and delivery and the immediate post partum period.

178. The National Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy was approved in 2002, and has been implemented through the Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan of Action 2006 – 2010. The Plan of Action sets forth a comprehensive set of objectives in the areas of integrated care, safe motherhood, reproductive and sexual rights, gender-based violence, males’ participation, reproductive tract and breast cancer, and HIV/AIDS.

179. The Government of Belize Health Sector Reform Program (2007-2011) emphasized strengthening the organizational and regulatory capacity of the public sector, service rationalization and improving coverage and quality of services, and the establishment of a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). A principal aim of the reform program included a national policy to identify, streamline and better manage human resources.

180. Data

Maternal Mortality has been showing a constant decrease going from 134/100,000 in 2005 to 55.3/100,000 in 2010. It should be noted that the main causes of maternal death are hypertensive disorders during pregnancy and in the last 5 years no woman has died as a consequence of spontaneous or induced

abortion¹⁵. Much of the decline is attributable to a 30.0% increase in the number of births attended by skilled medical personnel and to 85.0% of women receiving pre-natal care during pregnancy. This latter is effective even though only 14.0% access services in the first trimester¹⁶

181. In 2009 the leading cause of hospitalization for women in 2009 were obstetric events, while it was injury for men. The total fertility rate per woman in the period 2001 to 2007, decreased by 5.7%. The crude birth rate has shown a relative decrease of 15.0% from one period to the next. The crude birth and death rates, coupled with the 3.3% growth rate, indicate that Belize is in the third phase of Demographic Transition, which is characterized by a stable crude death rate, declining crude birth rates, and continued population growth. This phase of the transition is also characterized by an increasing burden of non-communicable and degenerative diseases on population mortality related to lifestyle, behaviors and an increasing life-span. This is combined with the continued occurrence of communicable diseases related to poverty, sanitation, environmental conditions, malnutrition and sexual risk behaviors.

182. In terms of access to contraceptives the number of young people aged 15-24 reporting the use of condoms the last time they had sex with a non-regular partner is 71.7%.¹⁷ which is relatively high. This does not necessarily reflect consistent and proper use of condoms and that the high rate of use may mean that BCC and IEC interventions are being effective. In 2009 only 47% of young people correctly identified ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV.

Teen pregnancies continue to be present in Belize, with 1392 cases reported in 2010. However, trends are showing a definite improvement with teen birth rate at 99/1000 in 1995 and down to 73/1000 in 2010.

The Committee recommends that the State party consider reviewing the laws relating to abortion with a view to removing punitive provisions imposed on women who have abortions and providing them with access to quality services for the management of complications arising from unsafe abortions, in accordance with the Committee's general recommendation 24 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and to reducing the number of deaths resulting from induced abortions. It also recommends that the State party enhance sex education and availability of contraceptives so as to prevent women from having to resort to unsafe abortions.

¹⁵ Ministry of Health data, MCH unit.

¹⁶ MDGs 2010 Scorecard and Outlook

¹⁷ SBS 2009

183. Abortion in Belize is still governed under the Substantive Laws of Belize Criminal Code, revised edition December 2000. There are only certain circumstances under which abortion is currently legal in Belize; legal permission for abortion is granted provided that pregnancy is terminated by a registered medical practitioner and that two registered medical practitioners are under the opinion, formed in good faith:

- That the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated; or
- That there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

184. In addition, subsection 2 of this section of the Criminal Code stipulates that in determining whether the continuance of a pregnancy would involve risk of injury to health, as mentioned above, account may be taken of the pregnant woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment.

185. A National Advocacy Working Group (NAWG) was established to address the proposal submitted by Bishops from Catholic churches together with the Evangelical Association, Jubilee Ministries and Voices For Life, a Belizean pro-life organization, to remove all exceptions to the criminalization of abortion and reinstate the reinstating the Offences Against the Person Act instituted by the British in 1861.

186. The NAWG ruled that the Act should not be reinstated as it would constitute serious and deleterious implications on women's rights, human rights, women's morbidity and mortality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Belize.

The Committee recommends that the State party give priority attention to the situation of adolescents and that it provide sex education, targeted at girls and boys, with special attention to the prevention of early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

187. Sex education is addressed in schools in Belize through the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) programme which was launched in 2006. The HFLE is a comprehensive, life skills-based programme, which focuses on the development of the whole person by: enhancing the potential of young persons to become productive and contributing adults/citizens; promoting an understanding of the principles that underlie personal and social well-being; by fostering the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that make for healthy family life; by providing opportunities to demonstrate sound health-related knowledge, attitudes and practices; and by increasing the ability to practice responsible decision-making about social and sexual behaviour.

188. The programme aims to increase the awareness of children and youth of the fact that the choices they make in everyday life profoundly influence their health and personal development into adulthood. The HFLE is timetabled once or sometimes twice a week for 45 minutes. It is either infused into other subject areas, or taught as a separate subject. There are two major approaches to delivery:

Discipline-based: the HFLE is taught as a separate subject;

Integration: the HFLE is integrated with other subjects in the school curriculum.

189. Fifty-two Master Teachers have been trained over the past four (4) years to deliver the HFLE training to teachers in the six (6) districts during Continuous Professional Development which is held in August of each year.

190. The Ministry of Education and Youth (MOE) has made significant advances in strengthening the HFLE programme in schools. Despite all these advances, the HFLE is still not being fully implemented in all primary schools and some teachers are still not trained to effectively deliver the life skills-based education curriculum. The need still exists for a structured and comprehensive HFLE programme in secondary schools. The MOE continues to build the capacity and mobilize resources for the full implementation of the HFLE which is enhanced as a response to the Ministry's commitment to the Mexico declaration where new goals and targets have been established. To complement the efforts at the secondary level, stronger and new partnerships are being established with UNICEF and with the Population Council.

191. The MoE has collaborated with partners like the Belize Red Cross through the Together We Can (TWC) Peer Education programme on HIV/AIDS prevention, which provides information and education services to young people in schools, and with the Women's Department through the Gender Awareness Safe School Programme as examples of extend sexuality education activities. There is an uneven application of the school curriculum especially as it relates to dealing with sexual and reproductive health issues. The Ministry of Education and Youth has curriculum with a sexual education component. However, the church-state system of education means that it is difficult to achieve a consistent approach in the implementation of the curriculum, since implementation is in the hands of different school managements.

192. The Gender Awareness Safe School Programme is an initiative of the Women's Department to work with schools in Belize to set standards that will provide a foundation for more equitable relations between girls and boys in our society. The programme started in 2005 and primarily focuses on enhancing their development so that they can enjoy responsible and healthy lives that promote positive experiences. In addition, the programme aims to provide a participatory and interactive tool to teach children and adolescents about the importance of Gender and related issues. Specific thematic areas that are highlighted are Gender, Domestic Violence, Sexual Abuse, HIV and AIDS and Self-Esteem among others.

193. Sessions are conducted in one primary and one secondary school per school year in each district. In 2008, the Gender Awareness Safe School Programme was implemented in 18 primary and secondary schools nationwide, while in 2009, 19 schools participated. A total of over 5,000 in-school boys and girls have participated in this programme over the past five years.

The Committee recommends that the State party step up its efforts to prevent and combat HIV/AIDS and improve the dissemination of information about the risks and ways of transmission. It also recommends that the State party include a gender perspective in its policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS.

194. The 5-year Global Fund Project, Strengthening of Belize's Multi-sectoral Response to HIV/AIDS, was concluded in October 2009. The Women's Department was one of the seven sub-recipients of the project and focused its components on reducing the vulnerability to HIV/AIDS for Women and Youth; developing information, education, and communication geared towards empowering women of reproductive age; and focusing on the link between domestic violence/gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS.

195. Initiatives under this project included: Peer Counseling Training for Women and Girls, Assertiveness and Negotiation Skills Training for Women and Girls and Executing the "Empowered" Campaign which brought awareness to the female condom and provided survivors of gender-based violence and other women with fashionable purses designed to accommodate female condoms. Other initiatives under the project included the development of a training manual on the link between gender, violence and HIV/AIDS and a National Young Women's Summit on the Feminization of HIV/AIDS.

196. Data

HIV data has in itself been transformed due to improved data quality as well as the ever extending use of the Belize Health Information System. The fact that the programme also has a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer specifically dealing with HIV data provides an opportunity to make better programmatic decisions based on the data that is being generated.

197. Data for 2010 revealed HIV infections had decreased for the second year in a row, in 2009 the programme had documented a 14% decrease when compared to 2008 data and 2010 data shows a further reduction in new infections by 33.8% when compared to 2009 data. The country has thus gone underneath 250 new infections for a single year, something that hadn't been documented since 2000, prior to the wide scale testing and the introduction of VCT services countrywide. While this is certainly mirroring a positive impact within the national response, the key age groups still affected remain those

between 20-49 years of age with the highest number seen in those 25-29 years highlighting the fact that much work remains to be done amongst this productive sector of society¹⁸.

198. As for the total number of new AIDS cases, in 2010 there were a total of 81 (30 female, 51 male) which confirms the fluctuating pattern and the difficulty in keeping track of those patients detected as positive, most patients won't show up again in the system until they are at the latter stages of advanced HIV infection and this is particularly so with the male population. The more predominant numbers are those between 25-49 years, the same age groups as for new HIV infections and this reflects the most sexually active age groups. This particular indicator is a little bit more difficult to track as a growing number of patients are being put on ARV therapy before they get to full blown AIDS so by definition we may in the future no longer be reporting this particular indicator.
199. The PMTCT programme has been highlighted as a best practice in the region. Out of the 6,631 registered pregnant women in 2010, there was 93.2% coverage with HIV testing and 53 women were detected as HIV positive. Twenty (37.7%) out of the 53 cases were known HIV cases and 94.3% of HIV positive women received Anti Retro Viral (ARV) prophylaxis /treatment to prevent MTCT. In 2010, 55 HIV + women delivered babies with 54 of these receiving ARV at the time of delivery. Fifty four newborns were delivered in 2010 and 98.1% of those exposed received ARV prophylaxis at the time of delivery; there was one abortion. The number of women who are HIV + and pregnant decreased by around 10% when compared to previous years but the biggest challenge is that almost 50% are repeat and unplanned pregnancies.
200. Acknowledging the importance of addressing gender issues when tackling the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Ministry of Health commissioned a Gender Analysis of the National HIV Strategic Plan 2006 - 2011 (NSP). Based on this assessment, gender gaps were identified to allow the formulation of an action plan to be anchored within the priorities that are outlined in the NSP for HIV & AIDS. This incorporates gender and gender-related training, as well as program development.
201. Generally, the analysis of the NSP revealed that gender is implicitly addressed; and there is a great need and opportunity to ensure that the NSP is more gender responsive; with a focus on infusing gender into HIV&AIDS services and programs in keeping with the unique realities of Belizean society and culture.
202. The following are summarized recommendations:
- Ensure that the operational plan is fully costed and that activities are gender responsive.
 - Include the annual review of the NSP in the operational plan.
 - The operational plan must make provision for addressing gender-based violence and the development of policies that respect youth sexual reproductive health and rights.
 - The operational plan should include costing for implementation of an M&E plan.

¹⁸ NAP 2010 report.

- Develop and implement a plan to strengthen data collection processes that accommodate gender responsive policy and program development including data disaggregation by sex; age, geographical location, ethnicity, employment, education, etc.
- Employ a gender-based analysis of national HIV data and annually update the Belize epidemiological profile. The analysis process should be inclusive of other sectors such as: Education Department, Women's Department, Belize Family Life Association (BFLA), PASMO, etc.
- Ensure recommendations are included in the gender-based analysis.
- Disseminate information to key stakeholders for the development of appropriate interventions.
- Mainstream gender into at least three key national HIV programs.
- Engage and collaborate with national and international partners to strengthen the mainstreaming of gender into HIV programs and policies.

203. **International commitments**

In addition to the Millennium Development Goals 2015 Belize has made commitments to other International agreements which serve as indicators to highlight the progress made in relation to women and HIV such as:

204. Universal Access to HIV Prevention, Care and Treatment

- In 2006 at the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AIDS, countries committed to reaching as close as possible to the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. Progress in the health sector is a key measure of progress towards universal access. The Belize 2010 report on the global health-sector response to HIV revealed some achievements as well as challenges in meeting these goals. The report especially documents encouraging trends in providing health services targeting women and children. More mothers have access to interventions to prevent transmission to their infants, and more children living with HIV are benefiting from treatment and care programmes.

205. UNGASS Declaration

- Another such commitment is the United Nations General Assembly Special Session Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. The goal is to control and reversing the HIV epidemic in 2015, and establish country commitment to produce biannual reports about the effectiveness of the national response, through 25 indicators agreed globally. To date Belize has submitted 3 reports in 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2010. Similarly to the Universal Access Report, the UNGASS 2010 Report shows

that there have been some achievements in providing prevention and care services to women and children but there are still some major challenges.

206. Policy Framework

In regards to policy and legislation, the UNGASS' Country Report 2010 shows that there has been marked improvement in the efforts at the national level to develop policies and legislation during the past 2 years. In 2006 Cabinet approved the National HIV/AIDS Policy and the National HIV/AIDS Workplace policy. Both these policies adopt a human rights approach, which incorporate the fundamental rights enshrined in the Belize Constitution and the commitments set out in the National Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan as well as international commitments to the Millennium Development Goals, (MDGS) and the UNGASS on HIV/AIDS, 2001.

207. In 2009 an assessment was conducted to identify the linkages between Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services and HIV by International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF), UNFPA, WHO and UNAIDS. According to the assessment, the National Policy on SRH (2002) emphasizes rights and integration. It calls for an end to coercive or discriminatory laws, including those related to HIV. It promotes: counselling on family planning options for people living with HIV; an ethical and gender sensitive approach; and integration of HIV with issues relating to sexual abuse abortion, STIs and GBV.
208. The National SRH Strategic Plan aimed for all public health facilities to provide SRH services by the end of 2010. It commits to implementing and maintaining an STI and HIV programme as part of SRH services that are accessible and affordable.
209. The SRH and HIV programmes have developed multiple partnerships with government and NGOs, supported by coordinating bodies such as the National AIDS Commission (NAC) and National Committee for Families and Children (NCFC). Through the NAC, there is collaboration on policy development, especially anti-discrimination legislation and improved services for key populations. Through the NCFC, HIV issues have been prioritized within national plans for children and youth.
210. The programmes also foster partnerships at the community level through collaboration with community groups working directly with PLHIV or women's groups. Other partners – such as BFLA, the Women's Department of the Ministry of Human Development, Belize Red Cross Society, AAA and WIN-Belize Secretariat – report SRH and HIV integration.
211. The Mother and Child Health Programme is responsible for the National SRH Policy and Action Plan and the NAC is responsible for the National HIV Policy and Strategic Plan. Despite policies that support integration, the planning/management of SRH and HIV remain vertical (with the exception of

PMTCT). There are no built-in requirements for cross-programme work, although the programmes on MCH and National TB, HIV and Other STIs have committed to coordination.

212. Overall, the country's health system suffers from shortages and inequitable distribution of health care workers. The National SRH Coordinating Committee seeks to pool human and financial resources to improve the implementation of the National SRH Policy and Action Plan. But inadequate human resources at the primary health level undermine the establishment of a comprehensive SRH and HIV package and there is resistance to accommodating the new model.
213. Most of the SRH and HIV services are provided at the same site, by the same provider and on the same day. For other services, BFLA manages a formal referral system to/from other NGOs, MCH clinics and public hospitals. The facilities focus on pregnant women and their children and do not target key populations. The HIV services most often integrated into SRH are VCT into FP and PITC and prophylactic treatment into PMTCT. Condom distribution is integrated into FP and STI services. Half of the facilities do not integrate HIV into services related to GBV or abortion.
214. At the private facilities, SRH services were being reoriented to include HIV services – by informing clients about confidentiality and routine HIV testing, training medical staff on HIV testing, creating links with NGOs working with PLHIV and specialized clinics for PLHIV. Overall, the facilities showed low integration, even though many SRH and HIV services are provided at the same facility and by the same provider.

215. Education Sector

The Ministry of Education and Youth drafted in 2010 its Education's sector HIV policy which was the product of extensive consultations with students, teachers, parents and key stakeholders within the community. Based on the framework of the National HIV Policy, the Education Sector HIV Policy affirms the vulnerability of women throughout their lifespan and recognizes the fact that there's a need to ensure active participation of men in the national response.

216. A key guiding principle of the policy is one of the ten ILO principles which is gender equality. This principle highlights the gender dimension of the epidemic and stipulates that all aspects of this policy shall be responsive to the different needs of employees and students irrespective of gender, class or status. The policy highlights the fact that equal gender relations and the empowerment of women and their partners, are critical elements of an effective HIV response within the education sector.
217. In response to stigma and discrimination the policy calls for a code of conduct to be developed which addresses ethical behaviour at the education institution, including the unacceptability of behaviour that discriminates against students on any basis including sexual orientation, gender and HIV status. It calls for all learning institutions to create rape and sexual harassment awareness policies through sensitizing girls, boys, men and women to enhance safety and protection. In the area of education

and training the policy emphasizes that the HIV education programme should be sensitive to gender, cultural developmental and socio-economic contexts, involving people living with HIV if possible and should form part of an integrated Health and Family Life Education program.

218. In regards to curriculum approaches the policy states that the Ministry of Education and Youth should provide education for HIV prevention that is evidence-based, gender sensitive and age appropriate, beginning at the preschool level before children are exposed to HIV, and sustained throughout their educational experiences. All students in education institutions should have access to HIV/AIDS education programs and that overall goals of HIV education are to promote healthy living, provide a supportive and caring environment to those affected by HIV and AIDS, and discourage behaviours that place students at risk for HIV infection.
219. The HFLE curriculum and the school environment should acknowledge and respect the presence of special sub groups of the school and general population who are at increased risk for infection and should create the supportive environment and response that can reduce this risk. These sub-groups include persons who take part in inter-generational sex and commercial sex work, men who have sex with men, uniformed services, migrants and the gay lesbian bisexual and transgender community.
220. The review of the National HIV Policy and the proposed HIV Policy of the Education Sector of Belize finds that they are fundamentally based on human rights and principles which provide an adequate gender perspective. The policies are gender responsive and provide the necessary framework needed for the elaboration of a national and sectoral response which is gender responsive and human rights based. The challenge at the education sector level is to ensure that the policy translates into adequate strategies which include the mainstreaming of gender and HIV within all aspects of the education sector and not limited to just the HFLE curriculum.
221. *Gender Mainstreaming in the HIV Programme of the Education Sector 2010*
UN Women is providing technical support in Belize to capacity building for mainstreaming gender into HIV/AIDS Programming.
222. The purpose of the project in Belize is to support gender responsive implementation of HIV and AIDS action plans and policy documents for the education sector and provide support for the preparation and implementation of sector specific HIV planning. This exercise is the result of special collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Youth and the National AIDS Commission which is the country coordinating mechanism on HIV in Belize.
223. Working within the framework of existing policies such as the National Strategic Plan, the draft HIV Policy of the Education Sector, the HFLE policy, operational plan and curriculum and other identified program and policy documents, this gender mainstreaming exercise sought to determine key policy and programme areas to be addressed. It also identified existing gaps regarding gender, human rights and HIV in the education sector. The process included consultation with key stakeholders within the

Ministry of Education and Youth such as the Health and Family Life Unit which is the HIV focal point of the Ministry.

224. In May 2010, Forty two stakeholders participated in a UN Women Roundtable entitled “Creating Gender Responsive HIV Education for Youth in Belize”. The participants considered the importance of mainstreaming gender analysis and human rights based approaches into HIV prevention in Belize and in particular into the HFLE curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Youth. A number of recommendations were made. As a follow-up to this initiative this consultancy seeks to support gender responsive implementation of HIV programming within the education sector.
225. Efforts to integrate the topics of HIV and gender in the Health and Family Life Curriculum have been supported by partners such as UNICEF, the Global Fund Project and the Women’s Department through its Gender Safe Schools Program. Peace Corp - Belize has also recently developed a resource manual which contains additional lessons for the HFLE Curriculum which is based on a gender and human rights approach to addressing HIV within primary schools. Master trainers of the MOE have been trained in the use of the Women’s Department Gender Awareness Safe Schools Manual which applies a life skills and behaviour change approach to addressing issues related to Gender and HIV.
226. This Gender-mainstreaming exercise found that even though efforts have been undertaken to implement HIV and gender programs in the education sector, the response is inadequate in comparison to the potential of the sector and the high vulnerability of its population to HIV. In addition, it is essential that existing programs which are presently addressing both HIV and gender be strengthened to ensure greater impact and sustainability at all levels of the education sector including early education, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

227. Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT)

A total of 6,310 (89.9%) pregnant women received an HIV test and a total of 60 women were documented as positive and 52 delivered during 2009. Of these, 36 (58.3%) were newly documented as positive and 26 (41.7%) females were known as HIV patients who became pregnant during this year. A total of 51 (94.2%) women testing positive received ARV prophylaxis and 49 of them also received ARV at the time of delivery. The HIV prevalence among pregnant women in 2008 and 2009 were 0.99% and 0.98% respectively. When applied to the entire population of pregnant women for those two years the estimated number of HIV+ pregnant women was 70 for 2008 and 69 for 2009. Using this data, an estimated 84.3% of HIV+ pregnant women received ARV treatment in 2008. Applying the estimated number of HIV+ women for 2009, an estimated 87.0% of pregnant women needing ARVs received it in 2009. Additionally, forty eight (48) babies (out of 52 deliveries) received prophylaxis at the time of delivery; 3 patients were unbooked at the antenatal clinics, so their status

was unknown by the health care attendants at the time of delivery and one baby was delivered at home.

228. The UNGASS 2010 Country Report hails the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission as a Best Practice due to its main feature which places pregnant women at the centre of care, and for this reason, all pregnant women who are HIV positive receive treatment at the MCH clinics. Follow-up care is also provided after delivery, including family planning services in an attempt to avoid unwanted pregnancies. The impact of the program over the years is high as it clearly has reduced the number of children born with HIV in the country, and by extension, the infant mortality rate.

The Committee urges the State party to give full attention to the needs of rural women and to ensure that all policies and programmes aimed at promoting gender equality, including those relating to health, education, clean water and access to justice and to credit reach the rural areas and are fully implemented at the district level. It recommends that clear benchmarks and timetables be set and that implementation of the measures targeting rural women be effectively monitored. The Committee requests the State party to provide in its next report information on the measures undertaken to empower and improve the situation of rural women.

229. Acknowledging the importance of increasing the focus of the programmes on rural women, the Women's Department has recruited a full time Rural Women Development Officer whose main duties and responsibilities are to focus the department's programmes on rural women by facilitating educational and training workshops in traditional and non-traditional areas, by networking with rural schools community groups and private sector to facilitate sessions for students, teachers, parents, community members and employees particularly on gender issues, as well as case management.

230. The country's pluralistic society comprises several ethnic minorities and indigenous Mayan groups. Among the country's indigenous population, the Mopan and Kekchi historically were characterized under the general term Maya, although self-proclaimed leaders more recently asserted that they should be identified as the Masenal ("common people"). The Maya Leaders' Alliance, which comprises the Toledo Maya Cultural Council, the Kekchi Council of Belize, the Toledo Alcaldes Association, and the Toledo Maya Women's Council, monitored development in the Toledo District with the goal of protecting Mayan land and culture.

231. In June the then Chief Justice, Abdulai Conteh, issued a Supreme Court judgment affirming Maya customary land tenure rights in 33 Mayan villages in the southern district of Toledo. The decision also ordered the government not to take any action contrary to Maya land tenure practices, including leasing lands or resources or granting concessions for logging, mining, or petroleum exploration. In an

effort to increase rural women's access to information about their health, the Women's Department held a series of Rural Women's Health Forum throughout the country. Sessions covered included: Gender-based Violence, HIV/AIDS STIs, Cancer, Diabetes, Maternal Health and Menopause.

232. Recognizing that rural women are often disenfranchised in terms of access of services and resources, the Women's Department through the Social Investment Fund and Caribbean Development Bank, executed an Information Technology and Entrepreneurship training for women in rural Belize District. This training provided these rural women with practical introductory training to computers and provided them with guidance on developing and managing small businesses.
233. Organizations like the Toledo Mayan Women Council have also taken on the challenge of increasing women's political participation in rural areas and working with indigenous communities. The Toledo Mayan Women Council is training indigenous Maya women who aspire to become village council leaders or village alcaldes. A positive outcome of the project is visible as two women were appointed in the positions of Alcalde (responsible to maintain law and order in the community- a very well respected and important position occupied only by men, until recently) in Toledo district.
234. The Belize Rural Financing programme (BRFP) is being funded jointly by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), and the Government of Belize. It started in 2009 with a mission *To improve the quality of life and income of the poor and near-poor in Belize by designing and developing permanent access to a wide range of superior financial services including savings, credit, insurance, fund transfer and other financial products and services that meet their needs at an affordable cost.*
235. The BRFP has been developed with the understanding that targeting women and youth, and integrating gender concerns into the programme as a whole, is critical to the success of the programme. The programme design document and the working paper outline specific goals and objectives for integrating gender into the programme. The main goal is to promote the socio-economic empowerment of women, including girls and poorest women, by enhancing their access to financial services and education.
236. The strategies to reach the main goal include improving women's livelihoods and productive capacities by increasing their access to savings services and credit both individually and in groups. Training and capacity-building opportunities will also enhance women's organizational and management capacity to manage productive investments.
237. One of the main objectives is to improve women's and family well-being through the promotion of women's access to savings and consumption loans that will increase households' expenditure in education, nutrition, and health, leading to the overall empowerment of women and family well-being. The project also aims to increase women's bargaining power within the household and build up the relationship between genders to avoid conflicts. The M&E report for June 2011 stated that 328

women had been targeted out of a total of 647 beneficiaries for a total of over 3,000 BZ\$ (1,500 US\$)¹⁹.

The Committee calls upon the State party to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 years, in accordance with article 16, paragraph 2, of the Convention, general recommendation 21 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

238. The Marriage Act was amended August 2005 the minimum age of marriage increased from 14 to 16 years.

The Committee calls upon the State party to expedite and facilitate the process of registration of children without documentation and issue them with birth certificates and identity documents.

239. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in June 2007 between the Ministry of Health and the Attorney General's Ministry for the purpose of improving and strengthening the vital registration system, in order to have an integrated vital registration system that will reduce data redundancy and improve the timeliness, reliability and accuracy of national indicators used for planning and decision making.

240. Since January, 2011 with support of the Equity Funds, UNICEF established a partnership with the Ministry of Health, Vital Statistics Unit, OAS, The First lady of Belize and the Belize Social Security Board to close the gap on birth registration. Concrete data is only now being gathered. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that the gap in birth registration might have widened significantly since the 2006 data was collected.

241. The Birth Registration Campaign being developed by the Belize UNICEF country office has as its main goal to increase to 100%, by January 2012, the number of children registered at birth.

242. The objectives include:

- To raise national and community level awareness on birth registration as a fundamental right
- To increase awareness of the importance of birth registration among stakeholders with specific emphasis on parents, health professional and community leaders
- To educate parents on the birth registration process
- To strengthen the system of birth registration at the national and community levels
- To ensure that 100% of registered children have a birth certificate

¹⁹ BRFP, M&E report June 2011.

To review and strengthen governance structure and policy framework for Birth registration

The Committee urges the State party to utilize fully, in its implementation of its obligations under the Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which reinforce the provisions of the Convention, and requests the State party to include information thereon in its next periodic report.

243. This has been addressed under each section.

The Committee emphasizes that full and effective implementation of the Convention is indispensable for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It calls for the integration of a gender perspective and for the explicit reflection of the provisions of the Convention in all efforts aimed at the achievement of the Goals, and requests the State party to include information thereon in its next periodic report.

244. Summary Scorecard: Belize Achievements and Challenges for the MDGs

Goals, Targets and Indicators	Baseline	2009		Target 2015	Progress to 2015
		Target	Achievement		
GOAL 1: ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY/ HUNGER					
Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living below the Belize indigence line					
Population below Poverty Line (%)	33.5 (2002)	30.5	41.3 (2009)	16.8	Not on track; significant challenges to achieve this goal
Poverty Gap Ratio (%)	10.9 (2002)	10.1	10.8 (2009)	5.5	Not on track; no significant change
Target 2: Halve proportion population suffers hunger					
Proportion of population less than minimum dietary consumption (extreme poverty) (%)	10.8 (2002)	10.1	15.8 (2009)	6.7	Not on track
GOAL 2: ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION					
Target 3: Ensure complete Primary School					
Net enrolment rate in Primary Education (%)	90.3 (1992)	92	83.7 (2008/09)	100	Not on track
Proportion of pupils entering Grade 1 G1, reaching 8 (%)	87.2 (2000)	93.6	91.9 (2009)	100	Not on track
Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds (%)	70.3 (1992)	90.6	94.7 (2006)	100	Well on track; surpassed target for 2009
GOAL 3: PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPLOYMENT					
Target 4: Eliminate Gender Disparity					
Ratio of girls-boys in Primary Education	0.939 (1995)	0.96.6	1.01 (2009)	100	On track; new challenges to ensure parity for boys
Ratio of girls-boys in Secondary Education	1.105 (1995)	107.1	1.13 (2009)	100	Not on track; significant challenges emerging for boys

Goals, Targets and Indicators	Baseline	2009		Target 2015	Progress to 2015
Ratio of girls-boys in Tertiary Education.	1.49 (2002)	148.8	1.73 (2009)	100	Far off track; major problems for males
Share of Women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector (%)	38.7 (1995)		41.7 (2007)	50	Not on track
Proportion seats held by women Nat'l Parliament (%)	3.45 (1993)		0% (2009)		Not on track
GOAL 4: REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY					
Target 5: Reduce by 2/3 <5 yr. mortality rate					
Under 5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	23.7 (1990)	8	22.5 (2009)	8	Slow progress
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	17.6 (1990)	17.9	17.9(2009)	5.9	Not on track
Children immunized against measles (%)	69 (1992)	96.6	96.6 (2009)	100	On track
GOAL 5: IMPROVE MATERNAL HEALTH					
Target 6: Reduce maternal mortality					
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	41.7 (1990)		53.9 (2009)	10.4	Not on track (Qualitative progress)
Skilled birth attendance rate (%)	79 (1995)	97.5	95 (2008)	100	On track
GOAL 6: COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER					
Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS					
HIV prevalence population 15-24 (%)	None		0.77% (2009)	None	No Trend data available
Target 8: By 2015, halt tuberculosis and Malaria					
Incidence of malaria (cases per 1,000 population)	49.3 (1994)		1.7 (2008)		On track (dramatic reduction)
Incidence of tuberculosis (cases per 100,000)	49 (1990)		24.7 (2009)	None	On track
Prevalence rate of tuberculosis (cases per 100,000)	78 (1990)		26.7 (2009)		On track; high degree of vigilance needed
GOAL 7: ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY					
Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainability					
Proportion of land area covered by forest	NA	NA	58% (2009)		Not on track; significant policy adjustment needed.
Land area protected to maintain environment	NA	NA	NA		
Carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions	2.7	NA	NA		On track – negligible emissions relative to global targets.
Consumption of ozone depleting CFCs	NA	NA	0.780 tons (2009)		On track –base ceiling awarded Belize surpassed
Target 10: Halve population without access to water					
Population with access to water source	43.8 (1995)	80.8	76.4 (2006)	100	On Track
Social Investment Fund Data - Urban	43.6 (1995)		99.5 (2008)		On Track
Social Investment Fund Data - Rural	51(1990)		90 (2008)		On Track, with continuous improvement
Target 11: By 2020, to have achieved livelihood improvement. Owners of their own dwelling					
Population with proper sanitation facilities	41 (1995)	94.6	64.4(2007)	100	Slow progress
Proportion of people with access to secure tenure	94.1	95.2	97.3	100	
Population with WC linked to sewage/septic tank					
GOAL 8: DEVELOP A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP					
Target 15: Deal with debt problem in sustainable manner					
Debt service as % of exports	13.1	11	9.5	8.5	Slow progress
Target 16: Implement strategies for productive youth work					
Unemployment of young people 15-24 years old	21.8	18	15	12	Slow progress

Goals, Targets and Indicators	Baseline	2009		Target 2015	Progress to 2015
Target 17: Provide access to essential drugs					
Proportion of population with access to essential drugs	NA	NA	NA	100	
Target 18: In cooperation w/private sector new techs					
Teledensity (fixed and mobile lines)					
Mobile	6.7 per 100 (2000)	NA	53.2 per 100 (2008)	NA	
Internet connections, dial-up and broadband	6 per 100 (2000)	NA	11 per 100 (2008)	NA	

245. The MDGs Scorecard and Outlook Report 2010 presents the advances and challenges Belize has experienced in meeting the development goals and targets. At a glance the Scorecard finds that poverty has been increasing in Belize long before the current global crisis and the country's development strategy has not been sufficiently conducive to economic growth and poverty reduction. All of the MDGs are linked through the national efforts to reduce poverty and indigence through development. In this regard, Belize must still find and follow the right track to achieve all of the MDGs by 2015.

246. Thus, the available evidence indicates that Belize is not on track to achieve the following 4 of the 8 goals by 2015:

- The core poverty and indigence reduction goals expressed in MDG1.
- The education goals expressed in MDG2.
- **The gender goals expressed in MDG3.**
- The debt management goals of MDG8.

247. However, Belize has also done well with its health-related investments. If its current health investment package is refined and improved, it is on track to achieve targets related to the following 3 health-related goals and the environmental goal:

- Child mortality expressed in MDG4 but with slow progress
- **Maternal health expressed in MDG5 not on track but qualitative improvement**
- Major diseases expressed in MDG6
- The environmental goals expressed in MDG 7 with respect to which progress is slow.

248. The MDGs Score Card and Outlook 2010 provides the following report for MDGs 3, 5 and 6 which are key indicators for the progress made in meeting the commitments to CEDAW:

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 3.A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

Indicator 3.1 - Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education

- The ratio of girls to boys in primary education shows that the proportion of girls relative to boys has increased. This reflects a positive achievement for girls. In 1995, the ratio of girls to boys in primary education was 0.939. By 2002, the ratio was up to 0.97 and at year end in 2009 it has been reported at 1.01.
- The fact that girls are now outnumbering boys in primary school suggests two things. First, the focus on girls has been successful and must be maintained. Second, there is now a need to focus on educational policies and strategies that would help reach full parity with boys and girls at the primary school level. However, one in every twenty boys and one in every twenty girls do not attend primary school. Beyond the issue of parity there is also need to focus on the overall participation of children of high school age who are not attending school. In 2006, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reported that merely 58.7% of children who are of secondary school age are attending secondary school and of the remaining 41.3%, approximately 14.9% are in primary school. The remaining 26.4% are out of school.
- In agricultural communities, the labour of boys is considered more valuable than that of girls and, while boys are likely to drop out of school to work on farms, girls are more likely to complete their schooling.
- It can be further noted that many in the Belize education system are critical of the suitability of the teaching methodologies and curricula as a means to address the current lack of parity in education.

249. In the case of secondary education the target of parity of attendance rates between girls and boys was also achieved and surpassed. The ratio of girls to boys was 1.105 in 1995, reached 1.087 in 2002, and has now risen to 1.13 in 2009. Thus, Belize has been exceedingly successful in bringing girls fully into secondary education. It is notable, however, that the small gender gap previously

evident in primary school has widened considerably at the secondary school level. This widening gap indicates a need to sustain and improve upon the gains made for girls, while introducing efforts to ensure that boys are not left behind.

- The same pattern of imbalance is repeated in tertiary education. Belize has done well to encourage girls to take up available tertiary places as the basis for ensuring improved capacity to win opportunities for entrepreneurship, income and consumption, but the country has faced challenges in achieving and sustaining parity between boys and girls. The relative enrolment rate of eligible girls to boys increased dramatically from 1.488 in 2002 to 1.73 in 2009)..
- The indicator on parity in education does not touch on the issue of educational quality. Some argue that girls and boys upon completion of schools are not satisfactorily equipped with the skills and capacities needed to make them productive members of the workforce. On a related note, the statistics do not capture the extent of the (reportedly common) practice of “social promotion”; that is, promoting failing children to a higher grade in primary school in order to keep them with their cohorts.
- It is notable and significant that Belize had been successful in achieving, the indicator on gender parity in primary and secondary education. However, gender parity in education is closely linked to poverty reduction and should be given great attention.

250. Indicator 3.2 - Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector.

- Belize has made only very slow progress toward the goal of an equal share of women in non-agricultural wage employment. Since 1995, i.e., over 11 years to 2007, the share has moved only 3 percentage points, from 38.7% to 41.7%, with a 9 percentage point deficit to be made up by 2015. Despite increased participation of females in education, there is still slow movement in women’s participation in the formal workforce.
- The slow progress is another manifestation of the under-investment in the type of capacity needed to absorb women from current paid agricultural employment or in the subsistence sector of the self-employed into forms of employment in which they use adequate levels of capital. This indicator takes into account women’s active and leading roles in other critical areas of employment such as in the health sector, NGO management, and education. While women tend to have a strong presence in these sectors it still remains that more

men than women are likely to access higher paying jobs including those outside of the agriculture sector.

251. Indicator 3.3 - Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

- The National Poverty Elimination Strategy (2007-2011), strives to support gender equality and women's empowerment as a "principle of good governance." The preparedness of women to participate in political processes on par with men is a fundamental indicator of the adequacy of such investment. This indicator is not simply a measure of how many women and men are involved in governing; it goes beyond this and speaks of representation and equality in national decision-making, and equity in national development.
- The overall presence of Belizean women at the national decision-making level is low. It is notable that Belize has not shown significant progress in this area; in fact, some regression is evident. In 1993, 3.45% of the seats in the Lower House of the Belize Parliament were held by women. Whilst this improved to 6.9% in 1998, there has been persistent regression since. As of 2003, only one seat was held by a woman and by 2008 there were none. At the sub-national level the situation is somewhat better, yet similar. It should be noted that the First Past the Post electoral system, which is used in Belize, restricts a constituency's choice of candidates, and therefore representation of minorities and women suffers from 'most broadly acceptable candidate syndrome', where the 'safest' looking candidate is the most likely to be offered a chance to stand for election
- About 32 per cent of elected village council members and two out of nine mayors are women. Per the constitution, mayoral candidates are voted for separately from candidates or councilor so that these two positions reflect poll results and not appointments.
- It is important to understand that in Belize women are active, vocal and visible in many parts of public life. They are actively involved in leading and managing large portions of the NGO/CBO sector and frequently use this medium to advocate for change. They are represented in significant numbers at the technical level and the mid-management level in the public sector and in the private sector. Of the sixteen Chief Executive Officers in Government, six (6) are females. Women are often the main drivers of church and community groups.

- The commitment embedded in the Millennium Declaration is that, by 2015, Belize would make consistent and continuous improvement in the relative capacity of women to access opportunities to serve as constituency representatives. Anecdotal evidence and interviews with women suggest that cultural norms and traditional perceptions of the role of women predominates, and as such, women continue to work “behind the scenes”, without stepping forward for election, and without being asked.

252. Current Interventions Directed Toward Achieving this Goal #3

- Currently, the National Women’s Commission is using the 2010 census to collect data on national perceptions of women’s role in public life. This information will further enhance the work of the Commission and influence policy direction for greater participation of women in public life.
- There is also an innovative and proactive initiative to train women in leadership and politics and thus prepare them for entrance into electoral politics. Efforts to improve the level of women’s participation in politics involved a first “Women in Politics Project” (WIPProject). The project was a flagship initiative for the National Women’s Commission of Belize and was also a first for the Caribbean region. It is designed to build a critical mass of women who want to serve as political leaders and provides them with theoretical and practical training in several areas of politics, including Voter Education, Parliamentary Procedures, The Belize National Gender Policy, and Running a Political Campaign. The first WIP Graduation ceremony was held on March 24, 2010, where 47 women graduated after 15 weeks of intense training. The “Women in Politics Project” (WIPProject) was launched on October 22, 2009 with 53 women of all ethnicity, ages and educational qualification. Presently the 3rd cohort of women is being trained.

Annex

List of Interviewees

Toledo Mayan Women Council

- Adelia Ishim, Programme Officer

Plenty Belize-

- Mark Miller, Coordinator,
- Tasha Petillo, Financial assistant (GFP)

Women's Issues Network Belize

- Lara Smith- PASMO National Manager
- Karen Cain- YES
- Rodel Beltran Perrera- Alliance Against AIDS
- Mindy Pratt Haven House
- Florence Goldson- WIN Belize Secretariat
- Carolyn Reynolds- WIN Belize Secretariat
- Kin Lyanne- WIN Belize Secretariat
- Sarah Lewis- YWCA
- Caleb Orosco- UNIBAM

National AIDS Commission

- Kathy Esquivel - Chair
- Dr. Martin Cuellar- Executive Director

Ministry of Health

- Vincent Perez, Gender Focal Point
- Dr. Marvin Manzanero, HIV/AIDS Unit (Director)
- Dr. Aisha Andrewin, Epidemiologist
- Dr. Natalia Beer, Maternal Child Health

Ministry of Economic Development

- Nerie Sanz, National Authorizing Organization

Ministry of Education and Youth

- Dr. Ellajean Gillet, GFP, Director Policy and Planning

Omdudsman

- Dr. Cynthia Pitts

Family Court

- Margaret Nicholas, Director of Family Court
- Sandra Arnold, Magistrate
- Alberta Perez, Magistrate

Magistrate Court

- Aretha Ford, Magistrate

Council of Churches

- Yolanda Murray - YWCA
- Reverend Flowers- Anglican Church
- Fr Noel Leslie- Catholic Church
- Pastor Papouloute - Methodist Church
- Bishop Phillip Wright - Anglican Church
- Rose Anishta - Black Cross Nurses

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- *Belize Health Profile, PAHO 2010.*
- *Gender Mainstreaming in the HIV Programme of the Education Sector in BELIZE, National AIDS Commission and UNIFEM, 2010*
- *Situation Analysis of Older Persons in Belize, 2010. National Council on Aging.*
- *Draft National HIV Policy of the Education Sector of Belize, Ministry of Education and Youth, 2010*
- *Gender Review of the National Strategic Plan of Belize, UNIFEM/National AIDS Commission, 2007*
- *National HIV/AIDS Policy of Belize, National AIDS Commission 2006*
- *UNGASS Belize Country Report, National AIDS Commission 2010*
- *Adjustment and re-draft of National AIDS Commission Legislative review and proposal, National AIDS Commission, 2008*
- *Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, Ministry of Health/Government of Belize/Pan American Health Organization, Belize 2002*
- *Gender-Based Analysis of HIV/AIDS in Belize, PAHO, 2010*
- *Evidence of Gender-based related Risk factors and Impact, PAHO 2008*
- *HIV and Violence against Women in Belize Report, Belize, PAHO/WHO, 2010*
- *Show No Mercy: Barriers that exist for men who have sex with men to access sexual and reproductive services, UNIBAM, Belize 2008*
- *Stigma and Discrimination: Barriers to Access, Care, and Treatment for People Living with HIV/AIDS in Belize City and Dangriga Town. Belize, Alliance Against AIDS , 2007*
- *Evidence of Gender-based related Risk factors and Impact, PAHO 2008*
- *Situation of Women and Children in Belize, 2010.*